THE

MARRIAGE IN CANA OF GALILEE.

THE MARRIAGE

IN

CANA OF GALILEE.

BY

HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.,

AUTHOR OF "BIBLE TEACHINGS IN NATURE," "THE TRUE VINE," "TWO WORLDS ARE OURS," &c. &c.

London:

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1882.

London:
R. Clay, Sons, and Taylor,
Bread Street Hill, E.C.

To Her,

WHOSE SWEET COMPANIONSHIP

HAS REALISED FOR ME

THE IDEAL OF MARRIAGE,

I LOVINGLY

DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

PREFACE.

FROM a very early period, the Church has recognised the importance and significance of the Miracle of Cana. Of the fifty-two marble sarcophagi originally found in the Catacombs of Rome, and now preserved in the Museum of St. John Lateran, no less than sixteen have carved upon them a rude representation of Jesus touching with a rod, two, three, four, five, or six waterpots standing on the ground — the number varying according to the skill of the artist, or the space at his disposal. In the frescoes and mosaics of numerous churches and consecrated buildings, the incident has been depicted in a great variety of ways; and Tintoretto exhausted his genius, in giving

expression to its wonderful beauty, in his great picture in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice. With commentators in all ages, the Miracle of Cana has been a favourite and fertile theme for exposition; and numberless books exist in which it is treated with more or less ability and insight. But notwithstanding this vast multiplication by art and literature of the incident, I have looked in vain for some work in which the whole subject has been gone into with that minuteness of detail which it deserves. I know of no separate treatise dealing with the miracle exclusively; although such may exist. I have invariably found the exposition of it mingled with that of other subjects. And in this way it has been impossible to do adequate justice to it, and bring out the great wealth of suggestive thought which it contains.

What I have not found, I have therefore endeavoured to the best of my ability to supply. And I venture to hope that, however inadequate my treatment of the subject may appear, the

method which I have adopted will commend itself to the good judgment of my readers.

I have long held the opinion that the credibility of miracles can be shown most effectively, not by the abstract consideration of the question, but by the evidence which their own characteristics afford. If the doubter is ever to be convinced of the reality of the wonderful works which our Lord performed, I believe it can only be by an attentive and earnest examination of the miracles themselves, individually and as a whole. No miracle will more thoroughly reward a careful study than that which meets the inquirer at the very threshold. It is the "gate beautiful" by which he enters the sacred temple of Divine truth. It is the illuminated initial which represents, in a pictorial form, the nature and design of the Kingdom of Heaven as revealed unto men. It is an acted parable of the whole Gospel; a type and image of all the work of Jesus, opening up a vista of light far into the ways of God.

This is the point of view from which I have tried to look at the record of the miracle in the following pages. And although, on a subject so very familiar, and so often expounded, it is impossible not to repeat what has been well said before, and to travel along ruts of thought which the study of many minds has deepened, still, I think that I have succeeded in indicating some new lines of suggestion, which may be profitably followed out. At all events, I have discovered in it beauties and meanings previously unknown to myself, and have arrived at a more profound conviction of its inherent and essential truthfulness, as well as its importance and significance than I had ever felt before. It is in the hope that I may succeed in making others partakers with me of this happy experience that I now issue this monograph.

HUGH MACMILLAN.

CONTENTS.

THE

MARRIAGE IN CANA OF GALILEE

CHAPTER I.

THE SCENE AND ASSOCIATIONS OF THE MARRIAGE.

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and both Jesus was called, and his disciples to the marriage."—JOHN II. 1, 2.

OUR Lord performed His first miracle in the neighbourhood of His early home. Among the quiet, green hills of Galilee, which shut in for so many years of absolute obscurity the beauty and fragrance of His life—as a violet is hid so close and deep by its foliage, that heaven may not see its own fair hue in it—He emerged into fame, to be the wonder and the mystery of His day. The precise spot where this manifes-

tation of Himself to the people took place cannot now be ascertained. Two places claim the distinction of being the Cana of the gospel—the one a ruined and deserted village, called Khurbet Cana, about half-a-day's journey to the north-west of Nazareth; and the other, called Kefr Kenna, lying much nearer, on the present main road from that town to Tiberias and the lake district. The great weight of evidence derived from name, site, history, and present remains, is on the side of the latter place, which is still one of the most prosperous villages in Galilee. Like Nain, its situation is exceedingly picturesque. It is perched on the slope of a low hill, at the head of several valleys forming natural roadways leading down on the one side to the sea-coast, and on the other to the Lake of Galilee. In front is a rich bottom, which becomes a lake or a swamp in the rainy season. In this respect Cana resembles the villages of Italy, which are nearly all built upon isolated heights, rising up from extensive marshy plains, not only for the sake of security, but also for the purer air and wider outlook. Its Greek

name, which has no Hebrew, Chaldee, or Aramaic form, means a reed; and was doubtless derived from the reeds which still grow in abundance in the marshy plain below, and utter their mournful wail as the spring winds pass through them. Several well-known places in Italy are similarly named for the same reason—as Cannae, Canneto, and Canossa. Cannes, the famous winter residence for invalids on the Mediterranean, has a like origin; and canach, our Gaelic word for the cotton-grass that waves its soft white plumes in marshy places, and is associated with so many tender allusions in Highland poetry, comes from the same root. The name was somewhat common in Palestine, for like physical causes produced like uses of language. Several obscure upland villages so called rose and perished without a record. There was a Cana near Mount Tabor, another near Tyre, and a third in Judea; which last, in the days of the evangelist, was well-known as the place where, in a sanguinary battle with the Arabs, Antiochus perished with his whole army. To distinguish the scene of the miracle from

the scene of this great disaster to the Jewish arms, John added the name of the province, and called it Cana of Galilee.

The houses of the modern village are embosomed among orchards of pomegranate trees, whose dark-green foliage and scarlet blossoms form in April a scene of enchantment. Associated as this tree is with the tender poetry of the Song of Solomon, and in Eastern legends with the marriage rite, its presence in Cana is an interesting reminiscence. Other memorials of its former sacred history may be seen in the village. The fig-tree still casts its grateful shadow over the white roadways, in remembrance of that under which Jesus saw in mystic vision the guileless Nathanael, who was a native of the place; and at the foot of the hill there is a deep, cool well, the only one in the neighbourhood, from which the water used at the marriage feast must have been drawn. Remains of ancient edifices testify to the hoary antiquity of the site and its former importance. The foundations of an early church and monastery, erected by Syrian Christians in commemoration

of the marriage feast, may still be traced. The buildings were entire long before the Moslem power was established in Galilee; and various pilgrims from the West visited them from time to time during a period of nine hundred years. Our own English St. Willibald, who was a palmer in 722, stayed one day in Cana, and prayed in the church; and, four hundred years later, another English pilgrim, Sæwulf, saw and reported regarding the convent, called after the ruler of the feast "Holy Architriclinos," the only building in Cana then that was not wholly destroyed.

With the beauty of this romantic spot the beauty of the miracle performed in it exquisitely harmonizes. The public ministry of Jesus opened not only amid the loveliest scenery of Galilee, but also in bright and joyful circumstances appropriate to that scenery. It has an idyllic character, strikingly contrasted with the gloom of its close. It is the fair, calm morning, with the dew fresh upon the flowers, and the sun gilding the mountain-tops, ere the toils and sorrows of later days overshadowed the land-

scape of life, and made it dark and desolate. On the fields and hill-slopes, the scenes many centuries before of the idyls of King Solomon, He drew the attention of His followers to the beauty of the clustering lilies, and used them as an illustration for His lesson of trust in God; and pointed to the birds that twittered among the trees, or flitted across the violet sky, bidding the disciples partake of their free, joyous, natural life, under the care of a gracious providence, taking no thought for the morrow. And in the homes and haunts of men, He shared in their simple, innocent enjoyments, and helped, by His own purity and gladness of spirit, to purify and gladden their homely lives. It is sweet to think that our Saviour, made in all things like unto His brethren, like every child of man, began His career in the bright home of Eden, and had communion with His Father among the trees of the garden of the fairest region of the Holy Land, ere the cherubim and the flaming sword of His substitutionary work drove Him into the wilderness to suffer and to die. Against the peaceful, blue background of the commencement

the stormy skies of the closing ministry are painted, bringing out with pathetic power the dark depths of their shadows.

With this joyous idyllic period of the opening ministry the marriage-feast of Cana is in entire harmony. Jesus had just left His early home in Nazareth, never to return to it. It was, in all likelihood, broken up at this time by the death of Joseph, the head of the household; for no mention is made of him at the marriage-feast. His mother and her family may have taken up their abode in the quiet village of Cana, according to a plausible tradition. With the sweet influences and hallowed memories of His old home-life still clinging to Him, still crowding tenderly about His heart, He would find, amid the simple gladness of the unknown home at Cana, a brief resting-place of love, ere He went out into the loneliness and darkness of the world. It was meet that His love for the world should rest upon the ground of His own experience of domestic love; that His infinite self-sacrificing charity for the human race should have its root in the ties and sanctities of the

family circle. The marriage-feast of Cana was the appropriate outcome of the quiet, hidden home-life in Nazareth; and all the life of Jesus was a development in the proper order—first the natural, then the social, and then the spiritual. His spiritual religion involved no denial of the natural piety of the heart. His mother was beside Him when He wrought His first miracle; and towards her, in her lonely widowhood, His heart went out with a more yearning solicitude. About the whole scene there is a wonderful air of domesticity; the sentiment is altogether human. Bethlehem reveals to us the majestic event of the incarnation, amid the family details and the birth-day greetings of an ordinary home; Cana discloses to us the secrets of supernatural power amid simple household rites and social joys. And these domestic associations are in perfect unison with the intimate relationships between God and man, and between man and man, established by the coming of Jesus into our nature and sojourning on our earth, and with the blessed titles of Divine kinship which He has deigned to employ. The places of the

soul in the Gospels that have a spiritual and supernatural interest, because of their connection with the mighty deeds and words of Jesus, have also a deep attraction for the heart; and, to adapt the lines of the poet,—

> "God's Word, which seems to sense above
> The simpleness of human love,
> To the love-sharpened hearing tells
> Of little or of nothing else."

There are water-marks in the narrative of the first miracle which establish its genuineness beyond all reasonable doubt. The details of time and place and persons are so minute and circumstantial that only an eye-witness could have recorded them. We find nothing that looks in the least degree like invention; indeed, the minute invention of the fiction-writer of the present day—one of the latest acquirements of modern art—would have been an anachronism at this period. Had the narrative been mythical it would have had a misty atmosphere about it, confounding all chronology and geography; there would have been an absence of dates, a confusion of places, a blending of events far distant from each other

in time and space, which would clearly show the want of an attesting means of knowledge. Although the evangelist in his gospel does not profess to give us a complete biographical sketch of our Lord—an exhaustive exposition of the incidents of His life—we find, nevertheless, that it is composed both generally and particularly with a most remarkable symmetry. There is a correspondence of part with part, a minute adaptation of details which prove the literal accuracy of its contents. And while the historical elements are used as means to an end; while the incidents are grouped together, not because of their chronological, but because of their spiritual associations—because of the subtle harmony of thought and purpose that runs through them—we see notwithstanding that this moral and spiritual unity is not secured at the expense of historical truth. The narrative of the first miracle at Cana proceeds in a simple and exact sequence. The evangelist tells us that the event took place on the third day—that is, from the last day mentioned in the previous chapter—when Jesus returned from the fords of the Jordan to His

usual place of abode in Galilee. The distance to Cana from the spot where John was baptizing was about sixty miles. Jesus could walk it in three days; and in all likelihood the incidents recorded in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel happened during the homeward journey. The disciples whom He called were previously disciples of John the Baptist, and had doubtless been with their master where he was doing his work. If this was the case we see a natural fitness between the reference to Jacob's history in our Lord's words to Nathanael and the locality where He uttered them; which would in all likelihood be near Bethel, the scene of the patriarch's vision of God, and one of the places they would pass on the way northwards.

It is a striking illustration of the Johannean method, which exhibits more a logical than a chronological sequence of incidents, which presents a revelation of the spiritual and eternal in the forms of time and sense, that the miracle at Cana should be mentioned immediately after the baptism of our Lord in the Jordan, and should be succeeded by the purification of the

temple and by the interview with Nicodemus. These incidents are closely co-related and have an intimate bearing upon each other. He who was Himself purified by baptism proceeds thereupon to purify the home, the house of God, and the individual personal life. His own consecration He imparts to marriage, which is the source of natural life ; to the temple, which is the source of religious life ; and to the ruler of the Jews who comes to Him for spiritual life. He connects the consecration of His own life with the ordinance of baptism, and thus fulfils all righteousness, not by a Divine method peculiar to Himself, but according to the rites and ceremonies prescribed to us. He changes water into wine in connection with the waterpots of the Levitical institutions; and with the observance of the primary law of nature which God had established from the beginning. He purifies and ennobles the religious life in connection with the temple of Jerusalem, which was the Divinely-appointed centre of the Jewish faith. He speaks of the new birth in connection with the pure, moral, and religious life of one who was a typical

representative Jew, who embodied in himself all the religious culture and training of the Old Testament economy. He thus proceeds to carry out His designs upon the lines already laid down; and shows us that the religion which He came to reveal was only an elucidation and unfolding of the truth that was contained in the religion in which the covenant people had been educated—that, in short, God's truth is one in all ages and circumstances.

It is not without deep significance that it is said that the disciples were with Jesus at the marriage. They were invited because they were with their Master, and out of respect to Him; and they are commonly supposed to have been the five whom He had so lately called to His side from their worldly pursuits—Andrew and Peter, Philip and John and Bartholomew, who was no other, in all likelihood, than Nathanael. Originally disciples of John the Baptist, as I have said, they were educated in a severe ascetic school. The forerunner of Jesus was essentially a desert prophet, living like Elijah, whose life-work he imitated, amid lonely wastes tenanted

only by the ruins of a guilty and desolated past. He stood apart from the ties and the interests and the haunts of men. His life was a continual fasting for the sins of the people, an acted parable of the repentance which was his solemn witness and loud watchword to the nation. Receiving their deepest impressions of what was right from such a teacher, taught by him to regard a life removed from all family relations and sympathies, and spent in continual fasting and prayer, as the specially holy and prophetical life, how must they have regarded the New Teacher to whom the Baptist himself had pointed them, as One so much mightier than he that he was not worthy to unloose the latchet of His shoe? Would they not expect to find in Him, in an exaggerated degree, the same qualities which they admired in John—the same rigid, penitential austerity, the same lonely, ascetic manner of life? Deriving His origin immediately from Heaven, would He not be still more withdrawn from the things of earth; not conversing familiarly with His disciples, not condescending to speak words of friendly admonition to soldiers

and publicans, as even the recluse Baptist did, but standing sternly aloof from all as a Being of more than mortal mould, belonging to a higher sphere? Such would be the expectations they would naturally form at first regarding One to whom they were drawn by an attraction, the secret of which was not known to themselves. It would be almost with a revulsion of feeling, therefore, that the disciples would follow Jesus, not into the burning wilderness and scarred ravines by the Dead Sea which John haunted, but to the lovely gardens and gentle declivities of green hills around the village of Cana; not to the locusts and wild honey of the desert fast, but to the festivities of a homely rustic wedding. They looked for a holier life and a more absolute retirement from the world; and they were brought nearer to the world than they were before, and taught that true piety consists not in the voluntary desertion of society, but in the far harder and higher task of living a pure and holy life in society; not in the proscription of any part of our nature or of our life, but in the right use of every power and faculty which God

has given to us. There was a time to feast as well as a time to fast. During the absence of the bridegroom, his friends might mourn and fast; but now that he was with them, they were called upon to feast and rejoice.

Jesus was no hermit, no ascetic. He denounced that unreal virtue, that imaginary devotion—consisting in fastings and self-mortifications for their own sake and on the plea that as such they are specially acceptable to God—which has been canonized by Protestants as well as by Roman Catholics as a higher type of perfection. He constantly warned His followers against the tendency of religion, as mere religion, to call enjoyment evil, and to put a ban upon the good things which God has created for our use, as if there was a curse inherent in them. He came to show that all life is potentially divine, has a vital relationship with Heaven, and that its various forms "do not differ in their inherent capacity for spiritual use, but in their opportunities for its manifestation." He came to destroy nothing that is purely natural and human, nothing that belonged to the order which He Himself had first

created and pronounced to be very good; but, on the contrary, to rescue it from the impurity and disorder of sin, and surround it with a halo of Divine holiness, the true aureole of the saint. And everything that aimed at separating human beings from the common work and life of the world, and sending them into deserts physical, mental, or moral, on the pretence of brooding over the eternal interests of their souls, He denounced as distinctly inhuman. This more excellent way He taught by example as well as by precept. He is the one perfect example of devotion and self-sacrifice; and yet He came "eating and drinking," mixing freely with the world, abiding with all kinds of people wherever they were providentially settled, hallowing by His presence their feasts and social gatherings, and seeking by all possible means to consecrate all the experiences and occasions of life. Not to separate them from the world, but from their sins; not to lead them into the desert, but into a new life, was His mission.

It is not without deep significance that the ministry of Jesus opens upon a scene of human

happiness. John is the only one who brings out this beautiful connection. The other evangelists place Jesus at once amid scenes of human wretchedness and sin; and the first miracles which they record are miracles of healing and comforting, as if the relief of trouble were His only work. This is in accordance with the idea of religion which has principally prevailed. It has been uniformly and almost exclusively associated with sorrow and death. Men have regarded it as a lamp burning dimly in a sepulchre. But Jesus taught men to associate it with joy and gladness, and to regard it as the sunshine of life. He gave them to understand that it is of the very essence of religion to connect their thoughts of God with every pleasure they enjoy; that "to be happy is to have in free and active exercise those faculties of the soul by which it delights in the Lord." It is not in hours of depression and gloom that we are most in sympathy with the nature of God and of heaven, but in our hours of happiness. God Himself is essential happiness; and therefore when we enjoy that which is alone true substantial bliss we are nearest to Him and most like Him,

and we instinctively connect our present joys with those to come—the brighter future to which we look forward being only the full unfolding of what we have already in the bud.

And how greatly do we need this lesson of Cana still! Piety is still half afraid of mirth, and mirth still suspects piety. The Church to a great extent has lost the position which she once held as the sanctifier of social life in the sphere of common joy and amusement. And in private life we are all naturally disposed to make God the companion of our sorrows; but few comparatively connect their sense of happiness with thoughts of God, and feel that their enjoyments are enhanced by the consciousness of His presence and blessing. We flee to Him as our refuge when troubles assail us, and abandon Him when all is well again; just as we hasten to take shelter under a porch in a sudden storm, only to leave it when the blue sky shines out. To seek God, therefore, in our happiness is the surest evidence of the genuineness of our piety—that we seek Him by preference and choice, and not merely when we cannot do without Him or when all other resources fail. In the

kingdom of heaven all sorrow is but a means to joy—all sorrow ends in everlasting joy. Several sections of the Christian Church impressively show that in their estimation holy happiness is a higher thing than even holy sorrow, by the substitution of a festival for a fast when the two observances happen on the same day. And in accordance with the same true instinct, Jesus manifests the glory of His incarnation more completely in ministering to the fulness of human happiness in Cana, than in relieving the desolation of human sorrow in Capernaum.

Further, it is not without profound significance that Jesus' first appearance to the world should have been in connection with a marriage. This fact is a standing protest against the tendency of religion, as mere religion, to make it a virtue to abstain from marriage. This tendency is peculiar to no age or country. It existed in our Lord's day among the Jews; it was denounced by St. Paul in the Christian Church as one of the most pernicious doctrines of its false teachers. It has received the countenance of the Roman Catholic Church, which, although on the one hand it has

made the rite of marriage a sacrament, and thus invested it with unwarranted sanctities, has on the other hand despised the ordinance in the enforced celibacy of its clergy, and failed, even in the case of the laity where it is allowed, to give domestic life its proper dignity and honour. Our Lord had no sympathy with these short-sighted commandments of men, which if carried out universally and to the full extent would extinguish religion itself with the extinction of the human race. He honoured marriage; He recognised the necessity which God Himself acknowledged when He said that even in paradise, where man was in the enjoyment of the glorious society of the Trinity and of all the holy angels, "it is not good for man to be alone." Marriage is a law of nature for mankind, a most necessary law; and therefore, just because of its naturalness and necessity, it has the most distinct hall-mark of the Divine appointment and approval upon it. It is the source of all human relations, and the means by which the Church is formed and replenished and kept up generation after generation. It lies at the very root of the Christian

religion and the Christian life; and it is the type of a heavenly mystery—a symbol of the most intimate and endearing union that exists between Christ and His own people. The sacred writers, in their constant use of images borrowed from the human household, connected their highest revelations of God with the homeliest exhortations to purity of domestic union; and asserted that the relation of the particular husband and wife to each other had its foundation in their higher relation to Christ Jesus. What occasion, then, so fitting for the Son of God to show His Divine power of blessing and hallowing humanity as that of a marriage? He came to purify this human fountain, that all the streams flowing from it might be pure; to exalt and ennoble this primary relation by His blessing, that all other relations springing from it might be ennobled.

Marriage is the best and simplest test by which a religious sect or community can be tried. According as it conforms or fails to conform to the Divine law in this primary relation of life, so ought it to stand or fall in the estimation of the world. It is a remarkable circumstance

that every religious enthusiast who fancies that he is inspired to proclaim a new faith, whenever he succeeds in impressing his convictions upon others, begins to tamper with marriage. The Mohammedanism of the East, the Mormonism of the West, proclaim themselves to be systems of imposture by their abuse of this all-important relation. The spiritual-wife communities which have sprung out of the religious excitement and revivalism of America are based upon radical errors, and are as injurious to human nature as they are false to God. On the side of sensualism or on the side of asceticism, every false religion is sure to err fatally. Nature uniformly revenges the outrage upon her law in every case. Looking at the matter then from this point of view, we see a reason in the very nature of things why Christ's first public manifestation of Himself should be in connection with a marriage. What all other religions have defiled or abused, it was His peculiar mission to exhibit in its true light, and to purify and enforce by Divine sanction. The religion of Jesus can justify itself by this one test, that it alone of all other religions gives to

woman her true position in society, and makes marriage all that God meant it to be when He formed Eve out of the side of Adam, and said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh."

Further still, it is a significant circumstance that our Lord's first miracle should have been wrought in connection with an event the brightest and most innocent in human life. He associated Himself first with what was most like His own kingdom in purity. On what scene of earth could heaven open more suitably than upon this happy home in Cana and this joyful bridal feast? We are told that Jesus was the friend of sinners—that those poor outcasts of society between whom and the blessedness of love a great gulf had opened up, wept out the stains of their pollution at His feet, and drew new life out of His sympathetic heart. But it was not to sinners like these, who were transgressing the pure and holy laws which regulate the relations of humanity, that He gave his first and special manifestation of Himself, but to those who were keeping these laws and

exercising aright the natural affections which He had implanted in their hearts. Heaven always comes nearest to the purest home. The love of God blossoms out of the love of man; and the glad, righteous exercise of our domestic affections is the very discipline by which the heart is educated for God, and trained to keep the first and great commandment. Its best field of growth is the home, that spot which "to the virtuous is a paradise still extant—a paradise unlost;" and loving the husband or wife, the brother or sister, the father or mother, whom we see, with pure hearts fervently, we are enabled to love the Lord our God, whom we see not, supremely. In this manifestation of Jesus to those who were keeping the Divine law of purity and love, we see a principle upon which God has uniformly acted. He selected His own home and parentage, not among the profligate outcasts of Israel, but among the pure and virtuous, however lowly was their lot; for His reputed father was a just man and one that feared God, and His mother Mary was of unblemished descent from the royal line of David, and was

of spotless character and devout faith. He chose for His disciples men who were looking for the kingdom of God and ready to enter it; men who were prepared by the teaching of John to welcome the Messiah, and who were decidedly the flower, not of one class only, but of the various classes of Jewish society. He ordained St. Paul by a heavenly consecration to be His apostle — a man not only the most eminently endowed by human learning and ability for the work, but who, as touching the righteousness of the law, was blameless. And in all His conduct and relations and dealings with men He showed that the best preparation for the reception of the Gospel is the keeping of the law; that a pure life and a tender conscience are the most fitting qualifications for the exercise of that faith which alone can save the soul. The Gospel prefers to receive men at their best, not at their worst, and to gather into its treasury of grace not the wrecks of human life, but the rich spoils of its youth and strength, its intellect and joy. The kingdom of heaven is indeed like a sower going forth to sow the seed of eternal

life, not in the waste, neglected common, but in the carefully inclosed and cultivated field; or like a merchantman seeking, not worthless baubles, but goodly pearls, and exchanging them all for the pearl of great price.

It is a suggestive circumstance that the first miracle took place at the village where dwelt the disciple of whom our Lord said, "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile." This disciple had the blessedness of the pure in heart who see God. In him the Jacob spirit of the supplanter had been transformed into the spirit of the Israelite — the prince of God. Having no selfish aims to hide, no doubts to suppress, the vision that appeared to Jacob of old at Bethel, appeared to him at Cana in a higher and more significant form. He who manifested Himself to the sleeping patriarch in a dream of the night, at the top of the ladder, revealed Himself to Nathanael in waking reality at the foot, in the form of a servant ministering to the necessities of others, and enriching the common enjoyments of human life by His blessing. He who appeared to Jacob in a

fleeting vision for the purpose of establishing a covenant relationship with a particular family and nation, has opened up by His incarnation a free intercourse between God and man, between the seen and the unseen, and established a constant communion between heaven and earth. That which was a special experience has become to every Christian an abiding reality. The promise to the Israelite indeed was fulfilled at Cana, and by virtue of his guilelessness he saw in the miracle wrought there, the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. The purity of Nathanael was thus not merely the quality which enabled him to apprehend the true nature of the miracle, but one of the primary reasons why the miracle was wrought.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAILURE OF THE WINE.

"And when they wanted wine."—JOHN II. 3.

ALL the beauty and gladness of the world come out in marriage. We see this in the humblest object that has life. The minute lichen on the wall concentrates whatever grace of form and brightness of colour it possesses on those parts of its organism which are connected with the continuation of the species. In spring the lowly moss assumes a richer tint of green, and puts forth its graceful orange capsules, when those vital processes upon which the propagation of the plant depends take place. The mushroom, product of decay as it is, so dim and unsightly in its vegetative part, develops a wonderful beauty in its fructification; for the white stem and the crimson or yellow cap, with its elegant ivory

gills underneath,—which it bears when mature,—is, so to speak, its bridal bower. And higher up in the scale of life, the blossom, the forerunner and source of the fruit and seed from which another existence is to spring, crowns the vegetable world with a halo of glory. All the wealth and beauty with which the summer sun has dowered the plant become conspicuous in the nuptial hour.

Nathaniel Hawthorne took in his hand one day a half-opened rose without blemish; and, smiling with a heartfelt joy, remarked, "This is perfect; on earth only a flower is perfect." It is by reason of what it signifies and foretells that the flower is so lovely. Its fair hue and exquisite shape, its rich perfume and delicate honey, are Nature's beautiful analogy of the marriage-feast. The plant is lifted above itself, transfigured into a higher nature, during this happy time; for the blossom is the part of the plant that comes nearest to the animal. It breathes not after the manner of plants, but after the manner of animals. Like us, it inhales oxygen and exhales carbonic acid gas. Like us, it therefore gives out heat;

for the flower is the warmest part of the plant. Like us, too, it needs sleep to recruit its exhausted energies, for the daisy closes its eye when the sun sets; and has ancestry and kindred, for plants can only be arranged into a true natural system of classification according to the character and relationship of their blossoms. And the two lobes of the seed deep hidden within the heart of the flower, full of starch, sugar, or oil to suckle the young plant which they inclose between them, and prepare it to begin its new life, is the vegetable counterpart of the mother's bosom. Scientific men tell us that the beautiful colours of flowers and their rich odours are contrivances to aid in their reproduction. They have found that flowers fertilised by the wind are dull and inconspicuous; while those to which insects have access are distinguished by their gaily-coloured petals. Perceiving the brighter flowers more easily than the less brilliant, they have fertilised the former to the neglect of the latter; and thus, by the survival of the most beautiful, the fields are adorned with a brightness which increases as the ages roll on.

Thus we see how intimately beauty and gladness are associated with the nuptial hour in the vegetable kingdom.

And the same rule obtains in the animal world. The season of pairing is distinguished by an added charm of beauty and joy. The dull crawling caterpillar blossoms into the blazoned butterfly; the glow-worm trims its tiny lamp; a richer crimson comes upon the robin's breast; and the woods that were silent all the rest of the year break forth into that most delicious of all music, the warble of birds. Bright-coloured scales and plumage, increased beauty of form and hue, the development of ornaments more or less striking, are identified in the animal world with the marriage episode. All that gives the peculiar brightness and gladness to the fields and woods in spring is thus literally but the deep breathing of the spirit of love in Nature. Nor is it different in the human world. That the dearest sanctities and sweetest amenities of human life should be connected with the growth and realisation of the conjugal affections, is part of the same Divine order. Poetry and music, a love of

beauty, generous thoughts and tender feelings—an elevation and purification of the entire nature—are developed by the sweet agency of a happily-placed affection, and are to human life what the show and fragrance of its blossom are to the plant, and the brightness of its plumage and the sweetness of its song are to the bird. Such thoughts surely give our conception of love a glory of meaning we never guessed before. How far down, how high up does the principle go! It touches the whole earth to grace and beauty. It seems to make very real to us the thought of a Father's heart beating in all things.

It is not, then, a mere caprice but a profound and far-reaching impulse that induces the bride to adorn herself with her jewels and to wear her brightest robes at the hymeneal altar. It is not a mere dictate of fashion, but an instinct that runs throughout all nature, that causes the profuse and joyful marriage feast to be spread when the union of those who love each other is consummated. It has the same significance as the glory and gladness of spring, which is the great

marriage feast of Nature. The outward circumstance is always made commensurate with the dignity of that which it accompanies and invests. None are too humble or poor to make an effort to provide as liberal an entertainment as their means will allow, and to surround the happiest event in life with an appropriate display of circumstantial significance. The ceremonies connected with an Oriental marriage, even among the lowest classes, were imposing and protracted. They began after sunset, when the shades of night were beginning to fall. In the gathering darkness the bridal procession was formed; and the bride, accompanied by the village maidens, dressed in her fairest robes, wreathed with flowers, and muffled from head to foot in the thick Eastern veil, was escorted from her father's house. The path was lighted with the ruddy glare of torches, and the footsteps of the party kept time with the music of song and flute. The bridegroom, at the head of a similar procession, composed of his youthful friends, went forth to meet his bride, and conveyed her in triumph to their future home; or, if that was too small a

place to receive all the guests, to some suitable apartment in the village provided for the purpose. The feast that followed lasted for a period varying from two days in the case of the poor to seven days in the case of the rich. So was it doubtless at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. The scene of it was a simple thorpe or village, far away from the grandeur of large cities, in the heart of the lonely hills. There was no great family dwelling in the place; the people were all simple peasants and tillers of the ground. The marriage was therefore a homely rustic one. So humble and obscure was it that neither the name of the bridegroom nor that of the bride has been preserved to us. And yet the occasion was made as bright and important as possible. A marriage feast was provided, and the merriment and festivity would be in pleasing contrast to the monotonous toil and care of ordinary life, and would therefore be all the more thoroughly enjoyed.

For the entertainment of the guests, in accordance with the custom of the country, wine was supplied, the produce in all like-

lihood of their own industry in the vineyards around—

> "Where the kneeling hamlet drains
> The chalice of the grapes of God."

Here men by their false scruples and ascetic notions have introduced a difficulty which does not exist in the simple narrative. Fierce polemics have intruded within the sacred inclosure of the marriage festival, and all its fair flowers of innocence have been trodden into the mire of controversy. And the strife is all the more deplorable that it is entirely gratuitous ; for with the miracle of Cana the question of total abstinence has in reality nothing to do. That question must be argued upon other grounds. St. Paul furnishes the proper principle for its advocacy, and I shall take occasion to allude to it a little further on. There can be no doubt that the wine used at this feast was the ordinary wine of the country, whose properties would be precisely the same as those of all other natural unfortified wines. The miracle took place shortly before the Passover, which is celebrated in the early spring

in the month Nisan, six or seven months after the vintage; so that the wine consumed at the feast could not in the very nature of things have been an unfermented variety. Our Lord did not forbid the use of it; He saw no reason to do so; nay, in all likelihood He partook of it in common with the rest of the guests, and thus helped to reduce the supply. But we may be sure that He who, though He came eating and drinking, was no wine-bibber or gluttonous man, would not sanction an undue or excessive use of what in itself was lawful and innocent. His presence and example would exercise a controlling and sanctifying influence over the festivity. No one present would have a feeling that he was taking part in a forbidden or hazardous indulgence. Indeed the sense of temptation or risk, as we know it in such a connection, would not exist at all. Wine in Bible lands and times was not an occasional luxury as it is with us, but a part of the daily food of the people. It was a simple natural beverage, widely different from the strong brandied wines that we use, but capable of producing intoxication if drunk to

excess. Such wine was among the first oblations to the Divinity. "Melchizedek, king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God." Through all the most ancient records of the human race, we can trace a conformity between the chief articles of subsistence and the sacrifices to Heaven. Wine and bread, in conformity with this principle, are the essential elements in the holy supper, because they are the essential elements in the support of human life in Eastern countries. And this fact itself reduces the temptation to excess to a minimum. What justifies the use of wine at the marriage feast is what justifies its use at the holy sacrament. In the one case it is a symbol of the element of life laid on the altar of God, which sanctifies every gift, in token that the whole life that is thus nourished is sacred to God; in the other it is a symbol of the marriage joy,—that fairest, richest joy which life produces when its hopes are crowned with fruition as the vine yields the blood of its grapes when the object of its existence is fulfilled, and which is meant to make all the

relations that spring from marriage happy. All therefore who would advocate the abstinence cause must not press the wine of Cana into their service, for it is altogether irrelevant. The abstinence cause is a truly noble one, resting on sound and incontestable arguments of simple expediency. Every one must wish it well, whether he practises abstinence or not, as it pleads for virtues most unequivocally desirable in the present age, and which conduce to the support and nurture of all good tendencies in our nature. But it will only be weakened and damaged fatally by any attempt to support it by arguments which are inconsistent with truth. It would be well to remember always that our Lord Himself did not lay down strict and inflexible laws of abstinence as to man's ordinary habits. He Himself was a law to His people in these things, so that they might come to think what would be pleasing to Him; and love would prompt restrictions when needful which absolute laws could not establish.

There is indeed, if we look at the matter a little more closely, a natural harmony, as it were,

between the fruit of the vine and the bridal festivity. The richest juices of the vine-plant are prepared and stored up in those parts of its structure which are specially associated with the propagation of the species. The water of the dew and the shower is changed into wine in the exquisite goblets of the grape-cluster, in order that the seeds contained in them may be enabled to fulfil their function. For aught that we know the reproduction of the vine might have been accomplished without these exquisitely moulded and tinted globes of wine at all—by dry, hard, woody fruits, as in other plants. But we cannot suppose that He who has in all cases adapted the means to the end with the utmost nicety, can have bestowed this beautiful provision upon the vine without some adequate reason, first in its own existence, and then in the richer blessing of human beings and other creatures. We cannot suppose that this apparent superfluity is not a real necessity, ministering more effectually to the reproductive function of the plant, giving increased vitality to the seed and a greater facility for germination. And is this thing not an analogy

of marriage? That rite can take place without any festivity, just as plants may be propagated without beautiful blossoms, or seeds formed without rich fruits, just as all the uses of the world might be fulfilled without the seemingly extravagant beauty with which they are adorned. But God loves not poverty or meagreness—a mere utilitarianism; He has accompanied the natural provisions of the world, and abundantly exceeded them, by that which appeals to the higher wants and capabilities of our nature; and therefore it is as natural that wine should form part of the festivities of marriage as that beauty and gladness should crown the accomplishment of the common purposes of the world.

Understanding thus the importance attached to wine on such an occasion, interpreted by the common Jewish saying, "Without wine there is no joy," we can realise what a calamity it must have been when the supply of it failed. How this happened we are not informed. It could not have been owing to the improvidence of the bridegroom or the intemperance of the guests. It may have been caused by the poverty of the

host, and the party being larger than he had expected; for in the East a nuptial feast may be attended not only by those who are specially invited, but also by as many as choose to come and bring presents to the newly-wedded pair. Perhaps the presence of Jesus and His disciples had unexpectedly increased the number of the guests. Whatever may have been the reason, the sudden stoppage of the wine must have been a cause of intense mortification to the providers of the feast, and must have cast a deep gloom over the happy occasion. In the East, where the exercise of hospitality even to lavishness is carried out passionately even by the poorest, any failure in a duty so sacred would be felt as a bitter and indelible disgrace. And this feeling of mortification which want produces has a wide meaning and application. We can all sympathise with it from what we have seen or experienced. We have all the desire to appear prosperous in the eyes of others. It is this desire which induces us to labour for those distinctions of rank, wealth, and fame with which the idea of happiness is usually associated. It is more the

value that these things have in the eyes of others, than any blessedness which they confer upon the individual possessor, that lends attractiveness to them and makes them so eagerly sought after. What struggles are constantly made by persons in society to keep up appearances—to maintain before the world the semblance of the position and well-being which they think ought to be theirs! Sacrifices and self-denials, the meanest and most painful, will be made in private, if only the show of substantial happiness can be exhibited to the public. Individuals will lose anything rather than their hold upon the good opinion which the world cherishes towards those who are well off. They are ashamed of everything that would lift the veil and disclose the real wretchedness behind. Poverty itself is hard to bear, but the disclosure of it is a thousand times worse. Its physical privations might be willingly endured, if it could be made to wear a smiling mask of abundance and ease before the world.

Now why is this? Is it because poverty is itself a disgrace? Are narrow circumstances, in which any one may be providentially placed,

themselves a legitimate cause of shame? Every one acknowledges that the distinctions of life have very often no relation to personal merit, and that the best of men may be poor and obliged to live in a humble position. But however we may try to reason ourselves out of the feelings of shame and distress which the discovery of our want produces, these feelings will continue to exist and to embarrass us. No argument of logic or common sense will avail against them. No truism about virtuous providential poverty will banish the moral feelings of distress, far worse, as I have said, than the experience of its physical privations, which it produces. There must surely be some adequate reason for this universal experience. There is; and it may be traced deep down, as it has been well said, to the underlying fact that man was made for happiness, and that consequently without it he feels himself to have fallen from his natural place, and to have lost the perfection of his being. Poverty and privation are associated in men's minds with the loss of happiness, and therefore "they virtually imply a charge of loss of the

true dignity and perfection of human nature." This charge is instinctively felt to be a moral one, and the shame which it produces is an unconscious witness to the primeval blessedness and the present defection of man.

That man should be in want of anything that is necessary to his well-being, that he should ever hunger or thirst, is owing to sin. There was no scarcity in the Eden life; and all the earth was appointed to serve man so long as he continued to serve God, and to pour the fulness of its blessings into his cup so long as he continued to offer the fulness of his homage to the Lord of nature. But man's sin changed Eden into a wilderness, whence no blessing can be got except by the sweat of the face. We cannot indeed trace the connection in every case between individual want and individual sin, any more than we can trace the connection between individual suffering of any kind and individual guilt. When a bridge has been carried away by a sudden flood, it would be useless to inquire by what exact particles of water the ruin was caused. It was the momentum of the whole stream that did it;

the action of each drop of water communicating itself to the next in order, until the accumulated force at some point of resistance inflicts the damage. And so, when a man suffers from providential poverty, it would be wrong as well as useless to ask if this man sinned or his parents, that he should be in such distress. It was the whole stream of human sin causing human privation and misery, bearing with particular violence against his special case, because of some special weakness that inflicted the distress. But while there is no ground for self-blame in this particular instance, the poor man nevertheless feels ashamed of his want, because he unconsciously but rightly attributes it to a loss of what was once the heritage of man, which he forfeited by his sin. It is a perpetuation in the whole human race of the feelings of shame which our first parents experienced when their eyes were opened after their fatal moral lapse, and they saw their nakedness,—the nakedness not merely of their bodies, but also of their souls and their circumstances, their loss of that happiness for which they were made.

Viewed in this light it is a most striking coincidence, bearing indeed all the marks of Divine intention, that our Lord's first miracle should have been wrought in connection with circumstances of want and privation. Our Lord's first public utterance in the Sermon on the Mount was also connected with human want. He began His preaching of the Gospel by holding forth the blessedness of the poor in spirit. The kingdom of heaven meets humanity where the law had left it stripped and destitute. It reaches the simplest and most elementary condition; and just as Jesus Himself in His own person and life, as our representative and surety, took up our condition at the low wretched point to which the sin of mankind had reduced it,—just as He came poor and naked into our world, so our spiritual life must begin at the low miserable point to which sin has brought us, and take its start of glorious development from nakedness and poverty and shame. It was in the empty, barren wilderness that Christ conquered temptation, and brought back the blessedness of the forfeited inheritance; it is in the desolate,

poverty-stricken wilderness of the soul that we must conquer sin and Satan in His strength, and win in His triumph the blessings of heaven.

What an expressive symbol is the failure of the wine at the marriage feast of the failure of the world's joy! It was the highest and happiest human occasion, and yet the sense of want intruded itself. What a testimony to the insufficiency of even the richest feast of worldly attainment or experience! Not only do sin and folly make a waste in human life, and reckless indulgences paralyse the very faculty of enjoyment, but even what is best in human life fails, —the sweetest wine of the heart stops suddenly or runs to the dregs. Not only does the prodigal who wastes his substance in riotous living inevitably come to want, in that far country to which he has wandered from God and from righteousness, but even the moral and the upright who use the world, as not abusing it, and husband carefully and wisely its happy resources, even they too, amid the dearest sanctities of home, exhaust sooner or later the world's capacity of enjoyment. We cannot

prolong the festive entertainment from the beginning to the end of life. We have no perpetual principle of gladness in ourselves, and there is no perennial fountain without from which we can always drink and be satisfied. Ever and anon some change takes place, and the supply upon which we counted fails, and with empty cups and aching hearts we have to confess that we have no wine. Joy ends in sorrow, desire in disappointment, effort in failure, love in death. Marriage itself, the crowning bliss of life, with all its dear ties and affections, comes to a close; and they who have wives are enjoined to be as though they had none, seeing that the wedded state is but the shadow of good things to come, a preparation for that enduring condition of redeemed humanity in which there shall be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but all shall be as the angels of God.

What a precious thought it is then that Jesus comes to us at every crisis of want, meets us at the low point of our failure and poverty, and provides for us what we ourselves cannot supply! He who was our guest, partaking of our good

things, sharing in the fulness of their enjoyment while they lasted, and in the sadness of their failure when they came to an end, now becomes our host, and bestows upon us His things, which are of higher quality, and whose overflowing abundance will never fail. He not only gives us more of our own human good, but He gives us something that is far better,—the very wine of heaven that makes glad the heart of man, the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

The wedding miracle teaches the twofold lesson, that those may find Jesus in their want who neglected Him in their fulness, and that out of the very poverty of their life spent in sin He can bring forth the riches of His grace, and make all earthly losses to become heavenly gains; and also that His blessing can change all the water of our joy into the wine of heaven, and communion with Him will keep our happy festive life pure and sweet and satisfying to the very end. The incident is but an acted parable of the Gospel, a miniature of man's fall and restoration. The bridal feast recalls the happy, innocent Eden life; the failure of the wine, the empty

wilderness to which man was banished because of his sin. The presence and the miracle of Jesus speak to us of God sharing not only the innocent, happy Eden life, but also the sinful, wretched life of the wilderness—going out with man into the waste and the want, to be afflicted in all his afflictions, so that by the wonderful miracle of His grace He might make the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad, and bring back once more the joyful abundant life of paradise.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOTHER OF JESUS.

"And the mother of Jesus was there. . . . The mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine."—JOHN II. 1, 3.

IT is a circumstance of which we are apt to lose sight that this is the first time that the mother of Jesus is introduced to us by St. John. Were we left to depend upon his Gospel alone for our information, we should never have known that our Saviour was born into the world a little child, in the natural helplessness of a human infant, that He lay on the bosom of a human mother, and that He had grown up with her through childhood and boyhood to the age at which He was baptized in the Jordan, and began Himself to proclaim the kingdom of heaven. St. John strikes the highest note at first in his Gospel,—introduces Jesus straight from heaven

at once in His Divine character as the Son of God. He says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What a contrast, then, between these sublime words and those with which the second chapter of his Gospel opens—"And the mother of Jesus was there;" "And His mother saith unto Him, They have no wine"! In these few simple words, so far as the Gospel of St. John is concerned, are compressed all the marvellous things connected with the human birth, infancy, childhood, and manhood of Jesus,—the whole wonderful story of the Incarnation.

It was the mother of Jesus who directed His attention to the failure of the wine at the feast. The evangelist recorded the circumstance because he evidently intended it to be carefully noticed. The story of the miracle might have been told without any mention of Mary at all. But how much we should have lost by such an omission! The miracle acquires an added interest and significance when we find that it was wrought at the suggestion of a mother and in her presence, and was the result of the promptings of human

love. The first influence that reaches the senses of a child is from the mother; and whatever miracles of blessing have been done in the world may be traced to the impulses and suggestions received from a mother's lips and a mother's heart. How true it is that "she who rocks the cradle sways the world"! How far the life and the words of a true mother go to make for us a faith in heaven that, working by love, can remove mountains and accomplish seeming impossibilities! Jesus was like all human beings in this respect. He too stood in the smile and lay as a child in the arms of a gentle and loving mother. He too was wrapped up in the very mantle of maternal affection, and was taught the piety which has its root in love. And now that He has grown to man's estate, and has entered upon His great life-work, it is fitting that He should receive the first call to the exercise of His power from His mother. From the position which she occupied in the house, and her interference with its domestic arrangements, she had a deep personal sympathy with the embarrassment of the host, in the failure of the

provision which he had made for the entertainment of his guests. She was concerned for the credit of those who were in all likelihood her near relatives; and she trusted instinctively to the same sympathy in the heart of her Son, and therefore she said to Him, "They have no wine." God had honoured her above women in making her the mother of our Lord's natural life; and now He was about to honour her still further in making her the mother, so to speak, of His public ministerial life. Through her the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father assumed a human form; through her the first manifestation of that glory was made to men.

Were the story of the miracle an invention, we may be sure that the episode of the mother would not have been introduced. An imaginary Christ would have no mother suggesting to Him what He should do;—that would have been deemed beneath His dignity. On the contrary, He would have stood forth alone, and with the halo of Divine unapproachable majesty around His brow, would have changed the water into wine at once by a single word. The real Christ was

a sympathetic man, with the tender weakness that is more beautiful than all our strength. It was no mere supernatural being who performed the miracle, having no connection with human relations, and standing aloof from all human experiences, but a man born of a woman, united to us by blood relationship, with a human heart budding and blossoming with all beautiful human affections. And how full of far-reaching meaning is this intimate connection of Christ's first miracle with His human ties and associations! He took not on Him the nature of angels, for that nature was unsuited for redemptive purposes. An angel is a unit, created directly by God without parentage or family relationship. Angels are sons of God, but they are not sons of one another. They have an individual but not a corporate existence; and therefore the Saviour could not assume the angelic nature, enter into a federal relation with these isolated self-contained beings, and become their substitute and representative. "Forasmuch then as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." We have got a Redeemer out of our own

bosom, out of the depths of our own personal being and human life. Human nature allowed Him to be born of a human mother, descended from human ancestry, linked by blood relationship with the human family, and thus to become the head and representative of a renewed race. From first to last He connected His mighty works with His human ties and affections. It was in the midst of those who were dear to Him that He wrought them. His mother instigated His first miracle; His mother received His last human recognition and message of love. At the marriage of Cana, in the height of human joy, He was surrounded by happy human friends; on the cross of Calvary, in the height of human woe, He did not appear hanging a solitary form between earth and heaven as art represents Him, and as He appears to the soul that gazes upon the Crucified as its one only hope, but encompassed by the friendships and affections of those, whose soul-absorbing grief was the surest attestation of His real share in our common nature. Once only, in the agony of the garden, is He separated as it were a stone's cast from those whom He loved; and His human

longing for human sympathy then breaks out in the touching complaint, "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" In all this, we have the precious assurance on the one hand that, whatever may be our degradation and sin, God Himself in the person of Christ has become the brother of us all; and on the other, that by virtue of our human birth each of us becomes one of the seed of the woman, and thereby is brought within the scope of a gracious economy of redeeming love. Let our natural relationship to Jesus, "our brother born," therefore, result through our faith and love in the higher relationship of grace for which it is the preparation. Let Him who is the Redeemer of our common nature become the Redeemer of our several persons. And then the relationship which rests upon a participation of our flesh and blood, and a sharing of our infirmities, will render possible a nearer and more blessed communion with Him than angels or archangels can ever know.

It is difficult to find out the full import of the words of Mary, "They have no wine." Some regard them as a mere remark dropped in the

course of conversation, drawing attention to what had happened, without any further meaning or design ; others suppose that Mary used them as a delicate hint that they should retire before the deficiency could be made known to all the guests. It was the presence of Jesus and His disciples that had unintentionally contributed to the failure of the wine; it would be becoming therefore that they should withdraw in time, so that the disgrace might be averted. These explanations, however, do not satisfy all the requirements of the case. The words are plain, and announce a plain fact; they must, therefore, be interpreted in the simplest sense. There can be no doubt that Mary expected some unusual manifestation of her Son's power in the circumstances. She drew attention to the want of wine for the very purpose of exciting His sympathy with their entertainers, and stimulating Him to do something to remove the trouble that had fallen upon them. Whether she had any idea of a miracle like that which Jesus afterwards wrought we cannot tell; but it is certain from the reply of Jesus, which would otherwise have

no meaning, that in the words, "They have no wine," she was giving Him some hint, distinct or vague, to do something out of the usual line of things to meet the sudden difficulty which had arisen. There was no wine, nor any ordinary means of procuring it; her remark was therefore an appeal for some extraordinary channel of supply. She thought that this was a favourable opportunity of displaying His wonderful power. She had watched His course for thirty years, "wearing the white blossom of a blameless life," in the humble home at Nazareth, and she recognised in that sinless development something that was more than human. She knew that a crisis had happened in His life; that He Who had previously courted the quiet shade had now come out into the full blaze of publicity, and had gathered disciples around Him who acknowledged Him as Rabbi and Lord. She had heard of what had taken place at His baptism, and how not only the great prophet, with whose fame the whole land was filled, had announced Him to be the coming Messiah, but even an audible voice from heaven claimed Him as the Son of God. All this must

have profoundly interested and excited her. The memories of early years, of the heavenly announcement and marvellous manner and remarkable associations of His birth, which had been allowed perhaps to slumber in her heart, overlaid by the simple ordinary incidents of the home life in Nazareth for so long a period, were aroused to a high-strung expectation. What might not be done by one whose antecedents were of so unusual a character, whose whole life was a silent miracle of beauty, and who was now about to display His latent glory? The sacred Scriptures told her how Elisha had used his miraculous power in the relief of common necessities, multiplying the widow's pot of oil, and changing the bitter waters of Jericho into sweet; and was there not a likelihood that her Son should prove the reality of His Divine endowments in the same manner?

But mingled with this desire for the manifestation of her Son's glory there were perhaps elements of a more selfish kind. She would not have been the true woman that she was, as it has been well said, if she had not something

of a personal pride in the expectation of His mighty achievements. It was natural for her, as for every mother, to wish that the greatness of her Son should be recognised by others—that others should honour Him as she knew He deserved to be honoured. A desire, moreover, very human, to bask as His nearest and dearest in the reflected light of His glory, would not be altogether unfelt by her, though it would be tempered and purified by the awful mystery that enshrouded Him. We cannot but suppose also that as a mother she would be anxious to keep Him as her Son as long as possible—to retain in the new and startling circumstances her old motherly influence over Him. Hitherto, for thirty long years, she had known Him only as the obedient, loving child, fulfilling day by day, with stainless grace and sweetness, the domestic duties of His humble home, and giving all due filial love and reverence to both His parents. And though things were now changed, she could not but think of Him still, as "one who would be always ready to carry out her wishes and anxious to consult her pleasure." And in

this, so far as ordinary domestic matters were concerned, she was right. She should never cease to count upon His filial love and reverence in the things belonging to the natural life. If any one on earth could move Him to exert His miraculous power to help her friends at the bridal feast, it would certainly have been His mother. But just as He assured her when she found Him in the Temple in the midst of the doctors, in the twelfth year of His age—with her mother's heart full of anxiety about Him—that He must be about His Father's business; so now He told her that a higher motive even than a mother's authority must regulate the manifestations of His heavenly glory: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" The rebuke is kindred to that which He administered afterwards to Salome, the mother of Zebedee's sons, when she wished to interfere in His ministerial acts, by requests on her own account. The gifts and blessings of Heaven, He told her, are bestowed not according to a capricious favouritism, but according to a fixed principle of Divine Government, a regular method of Divine procedure.

Few passages in Scripture have called forth more learned exposition than these words of our Lord to His mother. As first sight they seem harsh and repellent. There is a sound of human impatience in them which we cannot associate with the gentleness of Jesus. But our English version and our usage of the term "woman" are to blame for this. In those days "woman" was a title of respect; and what more honourable name could be given at any time to designate her who is the complement and helpmate of man? When the true dignity of woman is recognised and felt, that is the best name by which she can be known. Emperors have called their queens by this name; and Jesus Himself, in the last and tenderest words which He addressed to Mary on earth, said to her, "Woman, behold thy Son!" It was a name, therefore, that, in the soft, gentle Aramaic which Jesus used, conveyed no harshness or discourtesy, but, on the contrary, might have been given in the most loving moment to the most beloved. He avoided calling Mary His mother for the same reason that He refused to acknowledge David as His father. He was,

indeed, the son of Mary by natural birth, as He was the son of David by natural descent. But He was henceforth to be known among men no longer as the son of Mary, but as that which His baptism had sealed Him—the Son of the Eternal Father. "What have I to do with thee?" is an unfortunate rendering of our Lord's words. The original is a common phrase in the East, often used in the Bible when a suggestion is set aside and all further discussion of it waived, and has nothing of the seeming severity or discourtesy which our version implies. It is, on the contrary, perfectly consistent with the most delicate and thoughtful consideration. And were we present at the interview, we should doubtless have seen on our Lord's face an expression of gentleness, and heard from His lips a tone of tenderness, which would still further soften the effect of His words. That Mary's feelings were not hurt, we have sure evidence from her saying immediately to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

But notwithstanding this, the words of Jesus, which sound strange to us, had a real strangeness, and were exceptional and significant.

We must not forget that it was the beloved disciple, who took Mary to his own home after the crucifixion, who records the words, having probably heard them from the lips of Mary herself. And he would not have mentioned an occurrence which, on the face of it, seems so little flattering to the mother of our Lord, if he did not realize its exceptional significance. He knew that this was the sublime turning-point in the life of his Master. Entering upon His sacred office, even His relation to His mother, so far as His public ministry was concerned, must be regarded as dissolved. He must reject her interference with Him in His work. He must speak and act in the name of the Father alone; and be recognised in His outward relations, as well as in His inward feelings, as impelled by a supreme regard for His Father's will. The Son had now become the Lord, even of His mother; and her own happiness could only be secured by believing in and obeying Him. By Mary herself He was to be regarded, not as moved and guided by her, but as revealing to her as well as to others the Father in heaven.

Jesus could not get into human relations with us except by human birth. He needed for this purpose a human mother. This was no mere accident in His case; and the higher essential significance of the tender relationship, was that through it we might be brought into the Divine relationship, and receive the adoption of sons in the household of God. The connection between Mary and Jesus, as mother and Son, was meant to be the foundation upon which the higher and more enduring connection of faith might be formed. The outward relation through human ties was of value only as it led to the inward vital union of Heavenly love. The knowledge through the flesh was to prepare Mary to know Jesus no more after the flesh. It was necessary, therefore, that once for all she should learn this great truth at the marriage-feast of Cana. As regards His great work and mission, as regards His eternal being, she could claim no closer relationship with Jesus than any other person at the feast—than any other human being. The reason why He came into the world was to do the Father's will Himself, and to help others to

do it; and to accomplish this purpose effectually He assumed human nature, and entered into an intimate blood relationship with men. The nearest to Him, therefore, is the likest to Him in this respect. His true mother is not the woman who bore Him; His true brothers and sisters are not those who had a family likeness to Him, and grew up together with Him in the same house; but those who, having, it may be, no outward relationship or nearness to Him, yet show that they have the inward relationship of faith and love by doing the common Father's will. He came not to be owned by one human mother exclusively, or to be appropriated by a few brothers and sisters because they were her children, and to be limited to one small household; but that everywhere and at all times multitudes whom no man can number, of men and women, might forget their own people and their father's house—might forsake father and mother, wife and children, and house and lands, in order that through this self-sacrifice of faith and love they might become the sons and daughters of the Almighty, and the King of kings might greatly desire their

beauty. "And He answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And He looked round about on them which sat about Him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." This decisive lesson was doubtless hard for Mary to learn. It could not have been imparted in a manner more tender and sympathetic; and yet it was not in human nature to receive it without wincing. Mary could not forego without a struggle of feeling her claims upon the son whom she had brought into the world, and nursed and loved with all a mother's tenderness. This vital change in the old relations must have done some violence to the old motherly feeling of Mary. She was now beginning to realize the profound significance of Simeon's prophecy at the dedication of her Child in the Temple,—"Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also"; and to know that not without pain and sorrow, self-denial and self-sacrifice, in some faint measure like His own, could she have the honour and the blessedness of being the mother of the Saviour of the world.

And this fact, that it was through the human motherhood of Mary that the higher relationship of the Divine life was made known to her, teaches us, too, the great truth that all the ties of flesh and blood are means of discipline and preparation for the more enduring ties of Heaven. It is a striking thought that, instead of inflicting at once the sentence of death upon man's sin which He had threatened, God made provision for the continuance of human life, and ordained that Eve should be the mother of all living. Marriage, while it is the antithesis of it, perpetuates death in the world; but it is graciously appointed by God to be the means of bringing men into the higher Divine fellowship which removes the curse and abolishes death. It is through the relations to which marriage gives rise—father, mother, child, brother, sister,—that God connects the world of toil and suffering and death most closely with Himself. In these relations He applies the most gentle but the most powerful instruments conceivable, to raise man from the depths of the fall, and carry on the spiritual education of the race. At the marriage-feast of Cana we are

brought into contact with the most intimate and endearing connections of life. We see there first the husband and wife, who forsake father and mother in order to form this closer and tenderer union—to become one flesh. And does not this forsaking of the lower tie to form a higher one point further on, even to the forsaking of that higher tie itself, in order that the highest of all may be formed in that place where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but all are as the angels of God? Does not marriage bring home to the heart of husband and wife respectively that each of them is something better than a mere self, that he or she is part of a higher and more precious whole; and thus, does it not become a type of the union between the Church and her Lord? We see next mother and Son—the relationship that results from marriage—and next to it, the closest and tenderest that human nature knows. And Jesus, type and example of that relationship at its best and purest, here shows to us that even in His life-time its beautiful earthly significance had passed away; and that although the love between

Himself and His mother was never quenched or impaired, a change had come upon it symbolical of the change which removal to another world produces. Its lower sense endearments were absorbed and transfigured into its higher spiritual ends. By instituting between herself and Jesus this most wonderful relationship of parent and Child, her own relationship to God was illustrated to her; and in the sorrow which pierced through her own heart, she could realize something of the sorrow of the great Father over the sin and misery and death of His children. In the pain of child-bearing and child-rearing and, perhaps worst of all, child-relinquishing, she had the key to many of the deepest mysteries of grace, which would have otherwise baffled her intellect.

Doubtless there were in the company of guests at the bridal-feast, though they are not specially mentioned, the brothers and sisters of Jesus. And is not that relationship, which has almost all the intimate, habitual domestic intercourse of affection which marriage itself enjoys, a discipline of love, disentangling it from sense, and freeing human nature from its selfishness?

Does it not speak to us of that more than brother's love by which we know that we have passed from death unto life? Then there were at the feast other relatives, friends and neighbours, who are brought within the charmed circle of blood and association, that they may the more effectually bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. All these ties of family and of friendship are so many consecrated channels through which the life-blood of religion may flow from heart to heart. While they have temporary purposes to fulfil in the flesh, their higher reference is to the Spirit in man, and they fall under the powers of the world to come. The bonds of natural blood are meant to be the discipline through which may be formed the sacred links which bind in one the members of Christ and the heirs of God—those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, and who love one another with an affection which neither life nor death can change.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR LORD'S HOUR.

"Jesus saith unto her Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."—John II. 4, 5.

ROMAN CATHOLIC commentators have tried hard to free our Lord's words to His mother from the slightest shadow of blame. But in this they have failed; for the most candid of them have been obliged to admit, what indeed is evident on the very surface, that however gentle and loving was our Lord's address to Mary, there was a tone of rebuke in it. There was a weakness in her feminine impatience, a temporary forgetfulness of the higher character of Jesus and of the relation in which she stood to Him, an ignorance in her expectation that a mere circumstance or necessity could

determine the exercise of His supernatural power, —which clearly prove to us that she did not possess the immaculate nature which the Roman Catholic Church ascribes to her. And therefore, though I do not agree with those ultra-protestants who regard this incident as wisely recorded for the purpose of guarding us beforehand against the sin into which that Church has fallen, I cannot help looking upon it in this relation as very important and significant. Our Lord's peremptory refusal of Mary's interference in the things that concerned His public mission, and His assertion that, on the ground of the spiritual interests of His kingdom, He had nothing to do with her as His mother—and she stood in no nearer relationship to Him and exercised no more influence over Him than any other human being—strike at the very root of the doctrine and practice of the intercession of the Virgin. Mariolatry arose from the desire to find in Christianity not only the sanctification of manhood, but also the sanctification of womanhood, —the motherly as well as the fatherly element in God. In the humanity of Christ Jesus these

two ideas inhere; and in Him there is neither male nor female, but the unity and perfection of human nature, and the sum and realization of all human relations. Jesus Christ Himself is the expression of the love of God, of the fatherly and motherly nature in Him. But this great truth was lost sight of in the dark ages; and the strange idea arose that even Christ Himself was what God was formerly conceived to be, a stern and angry Judge, needing intercession and appeased with difficulty. The manhood in Him, from its very sinlessness, was supposed to be implacable; and therefore the pitying, compassionate womanhood was personified by His mother, who acted the part of intercessor between Him and a guilty world. She was a human being, having all a human being's experience of sin, its temptations, trials, and sorrows; having the consciousness of weakness in herself, teaching her how hard it is not to sin, which would necessarily make her compassionate towards others. We all know how, step by step, she has been raised from that position of participation in human sin and sorrow to an exemption from

the human lot and an elevation above all human frailty. We can trace this gradual ascent in the pictures of her which exist in the Roman Catholic Church from the earliest times, representing her first as alone; then with the infant Saviour in her arms; then with Christ crowning her; then kneeling before Him; then sitting a little lower; then on a level with Him. And now there is a tendency to place her above Him; for throughout Christendom there are far more churches dedicated to Mary than to her Divine Son. In the Eternal City it is not the one God of Jews and Christians who is worshipped; it is not He whom Christians believe to be God blessed for ever, incarnate in the flesh of man. God the Father is almost unknown, and God the Son has ceased to be an object of adoration. The former is represented in the pictures in the churches as an old man, and the Saviour is uniformly exhibited as a little child; and both are made subservient to the glorification of the Virgin Mary, who is clothed with the incommunicable attributes of the Godhead.

But there is a Nemesis in this last monstrous

development of Mariolatry. It will in the end defeat the very purpose for which it exists. By making the doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin an essential article of the Roman creed, and thus paying Divine honours to her, she is removed further from the sympathies of men, and the attraction of her intercession will ultimately be weakened. What made her worship so alluring was the mistaken idea that just because she was a tender human being —a loving, sainted mother—having the knowledge of sin, she would be less severe towards the frailties of men. But this charm she will lose by her deification. The same process of moral deterioration will take place in the minds of her votaries regarding her, which took place in the minds of the worshippers, first of the Father, and then of the Son. She, too, in the end will come to be regarded as a stern and implacable judge, having no sympathy with men, because she is herself withdrawn from the possibilities of their frailties; and the confiding trustfulness with which prayers are now offered to her will cease to be felt. Indeed the change

has already taken place, and the supposed mother of the Virgin, called St. Anne, is now invoked to entreat her daughter to ask her Son to be propitious to the suppliant. Where is to be the end of such mediatorship? May not the Virgin's grandmother be also brought in? And if the Virgin is to be regarded as conceived without sin, must not her mother also—and so on—back to Adam; and thus the doctrine of the fall and of original sin be done away with altogether, and with it the standing-ground and necessity of the Church? How simple and satisfactory the truth itself which is thus so strangely perverted! "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

What did Jesus mean by saying, "Mine hour is not yet come"? This is a phrase which we meet often in the Gospel of St. John. It is almost peculiar to this Evangelist, and is one of those key-words or phrases which he so often

uses to unlock the profoundest mysteries. We are not to understand by it that Jesus deemed the occasion unworthy of His interference; that the want of wine was not a sufficient reason for working a miracle. He who numbers the very hairs of our head and marks the fall of every sparrow to the ground, estimates by a wiser and more loving rule the occasions which we imagine to be too humble and trifling; and in the affairs of the Eternal all distinctions of greatness and littleness are lost sight of. His own dignity redeems the smallest things from their insignificance, and invests them with a share of His own majesty, just as the minutest flower growing under the shadow of a lofty mountain partakes of its grandeur. In the present instance He looked at the matter, not from His own point of view, but from that of others. He knew that the happiness of a poor but pious couple, if they should be spared the mortification of a breach of hospitality on their wedding day, depended upon His interference. There was, besides, a moral lesson to be taught to the disciples, which required to be enforced by something out of the

usual course. Only some such mighty work as He did perform could harmonise the striking contrast in their minds between the teaching of the Baptist and His own example. He was indeed reluctant to perform the miracle. With Him there was no lavish or gratuitous display of His supernatural power. We can trace this reluctance in all His miracles. None of them were performed without adequate cause. He interfered only when His help was absolutely necessary. We infer this from the fewness of the miracles which He wrought, the orderly conditions under which He performed them, and the economical way in which He made His supernatural assistance go so far as to accomplish the object in view, and no farther. There was nothing of the magician or thaumaturgist about Jesus. Notwithstanding this reluctance, however, He was moved by the powerfully determining motives that existed in the case to work the necessary miracle on this occasion. But the appropriate time for it had not as yet come.

Our Lord's hour was the time fixed by the Father to whose holy will, of which He had

always immediate intimation, He was profoundly submissive. No outward event or motive could decide when it was right for Him to do a mighty work. Partaking of our human nature, He must have felt the full force of the natural and sinless impulses—the feeling of pity, the promptings of benevolence and kindness, the desire to help and please—that actuate us. But we do not find that He followed exclusively in any one instance these proper human impulses. The Spirit which He had received without measure could alone regulate His actions. He waited obscure and inactive for thirty long years until the hour appointed by His Father had come for beginning His public ministry; and when He entered upon His career, all its actions and incidents were regulated solely by reference to the Father's predetermined purpose. He kept silence, or spoke; He wrought a mighty work, or refused to do so; He went into the city, or retired into the solitude, in exclusive obedience to the Divine intimation. He hid Himself from death because His hour had not yet come; He exposed Himself to it at the appointed time. We are here on the brink of a

great mystery which we cannot fathom. The consciousness no less than the nature of supernatural power is hidden in a darkness which our philosophy cannot penetrate.

Some suppose that when Mary said, "They have no wine," the supply, though about to fail, was not yet exhausted, and Jesus waited till the vessels were all empty before interfering, on the ground that man's extremity is God's opportunity. But whatever might have been the immediate subordinate reference of Christ's words, there can be no doubt that their ultimate reference was to that point of His life most decisive of all, the hour of His glorification. The Lord's time, that lay within and beyond all particular times, was the time of His exaltation as a Prince and a Saviour. This was the state to which Jesus ever looked forward as that in which He should be able to do all for the world which He had pledged Himself to do. But the way to that vantage-ground lay through the valley of the shadow of death. The hour in which He was to be glorified was also the hour in which His earthly career should be finished. Everything

that helped to make Him better known among men and to advance His cause; every display of His greatness and goodness, every miracle which He wrought, prepared the way for His final hour. It was with Himself as it is with one of those lilies, whose mode of growth—on account of the deep spiritual mysteries contained in it—He bade us consider. In the lily the act of flowering is the prelude to and the cause of death. It is the dying plant that blossoms. When it puts forth its flower in which all its beauty culminates, its vital force is exhausted, and it immediately begins to fade and die. And every process in its economy by which the hour of its blossoming is hastened is a prophecy of and a preparation for its decease. And so was it with Him who is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley. During the thirty years of His obscure life in Nazareth, He had done nothing to excite the attention or provoke the hostility of the Jews. He grew, we are told, in favour with God and man. The world smiled upon Him so long as He did not set Himself in opposition to it, by introducing a better faith and a

holier life. But when He began to proclaim and manifest His divine nature and mission, He at once began to arouse the hatred and jealousy of the world. And in proportion as His glory grew and revealed itself to man, so in proportion did the desire of the wicked increase to rid the world of His presence.

Jesus therefore connected the hour of His greatest triumph with the hour of His greatest defeat. His glory and His death were always associated together in His mind; and everything that tended to promote the one only hastened and made more sure the other. In the height of His glory on the Transfiguration Mount, He spoke with the celestial visitors of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. And on the occasion of His triumphal entrance into the holy city, when the Greek proselytes desired to see Him, and He realized all the glorious significance of the incident, He uttered the parable of the seed quickened and multiplied by its death, and indicated its fulfilment in Himself by the exclamation "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour."

This note of warning that the end was drawing nigh was sounded in His ears from the very commencement of His public career. He alone of all mankind was born expressly to die. He alone had a perfect foreknowledge of all that awaited Him in the future. His whole life was therefore one long walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The horizon of His mind was filled long before with visions of the cruel and humiliating scenes which constituted His passion. And we can easily conceive how greatly this foreknowledge must have aggravated the burden of His sufferings. Made in all things like unto His brethren, He had that human shrinking from death which is always strongest in the most refined nature. Though He had the strength of the Godhead to support Him, He started back ever and anon, and needed to encourage Himself by recalling the object of His suffering and the reward that was set before Him. And when we remember thus how constantly the last and most painful scenes of His life were present to the forethought of Jesus, we have a more vivid sense of the willingness of His self-oblation. He

saw the hour before Him; and notwithstanding all the pain and shame which it involved, notwithstanding the shrinking of His own human nature from it, He walked steadily onwards towards it, resolute to do the Father's will and accomplish through His suffering and death the salvation of the world.

In the festal joy of the marriage of Cana we can detect an undertone of the same foreboding sorrow which we can hear in the later scenes of His life. Far off, in this sunny hour seemed the darkness of Gethsemane and the Cross; but they cast their shadows before them. He knew the inevitable connection between the miracle which He was about to work and His hour of doom. He foresaw that the very first public act which would introduce Him in His power and greatness to the world would hasten on the crisis of His fate; would commence the vindictive opposition of His enemies which would ultimately triumph in His death. Over the happy bridal feast of Cana the shadow of the crucifixion rested as truly as over the last sorrowful supper in the upper room at Jerusalem,

with its memorials of His broken body and shed blood. And therefore we need not wonder that He should hesitate before performing an act which involved such tremendous issues. We need not wonder that He should pause before taking the first step on a path that led to Calvary—that He should have the same human apprehension, the same counting of the awful cost, which caused Him later on to cry, "Father, save me from this hour," and made Him put away for one brief moment the cup proffered to His lips in Gethsemane with the entreaty, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." His mother knew nothing of all this. She knew not what was implied in her request, most natural as it was to a mother's heart, that He should begin His public ministry by doing some signal work which would reveal His true greatness to the eyes of men. She had no idea that He was to be a suffering Messiah, that His life was to be short and full of sorrow. Doubtless she pictured long years before her in which the triumph and success of her Son would be her greatest happiness. But Jesus in

His gentle words of rebuke, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come," struck a note of warning which He meant to vibrate long in her heart, like the memorable saying of Simeon in the Temple. He prepared her for what was in store for them both, and what would inevitably be hastened by the miracle which He was now about to perform. This is her first appearance in the Gospel of St. John; and it is a striking thought that we never hear of her again in it until she stands beside the Cross. She is associated with the two occasions only, as if to show the profound relations between them.

And is not this prophecy of sorrow in the midst of earth's highest joy, this foreshadowing of the Cross by the first manifestation of Christ's glory, typical of what is a common human experience? What did the marriage in Cana itself indicate but the commencement of the most serious part in the drama of life, in which self-sacrifice is continually necessary? What did it foretell but the hour of the young couple's death? Marriage is nature's preparation

for death. Death empties the world, and marriage is ordained to replenish it. The happiest hour of life is thus intimately connected with the saddest. It is the beginning of the end. The human plant in its blossoming indicates its approaching decay. In the wedding song there is a refrain of woe, which reminds us of the design for which the institution exists, and the fate in which it must end. And so with all the glories of man. They are as the flower of the grass which proclaims the inevitable withering and death. Triumph and success, if they come at all, usually come late in life; and they are associated with ebbing strength and failing desire, which rob them of nearly all the pleasure that they bring. The things we toil and long for, during many years of privation, we commonly get when the free fresh heart of youth that would have truly enjoyed them, is ours no longer, and the friends whose loving smiles would have given them all their value have left us for ever. To the beloved dead the hero that is crowned too late for them is still uncrowned; and no matter what our after successes may be, what we were when the friend

of our bosom left us lonely on the earth, we are still and must always be. Earth's glories come to us with sad auguries, like the soft sunny smiles of September skies, which gild the fading leaves with a mockery of May, while winter peeps like death behind to shut the farewell scene. Blessed are we if, when we feel like Jesus the nearness of our glory to the end of all here, and are saddened by the thought, we can at the same time look forward like Him to the glory that shall follow, and to which this suffering is but the way! If Death stands at the end of every vista of human bliss, he cannot close up or darken the path so as to prevent our seeing beyond, and recognising, in the light that streams past him from another world, that the most precious thing in every possession is a promise, in every love a prophecy, and in every joy a foretaste of immortal bliss.

The scene between Jesus and His mother reminds us forcibly of the interview which He had afterwards with the Syro-Phœnician woman. The resemblance between the two incidents is very close. In both cases a petition is at first refused and then granted—a repulse is converted into a

welcome; and faith draws from a hindrance interposed by Jesus Himself an assurance that the prayer will be answered. Mary, like the Syro-Phœnician woman, believed in the supernatural power of Jesus. Her faith was a necessary element in the miracle; for without that preparation of the recipient mind which fits it for extraordinary gifts—that miracle within which rises to meet the miracle without, and renders all things possible to him that believeth—Jesus could do no mighty work. But her faith, though strong, needed to be made still stronger, and purified of certain weak and sinful elements that mingled with it; and therefore He placed a difficulty in the way, that in the recoil she might gather spiritual force to overcome it, and in the overcoming, all the impure elements in her faith might be removed; as water that is polluted in its stillness acquires a snowy whiteness when passing over a weir. When He treats us in the same manner; when He answers us not a word as in the case of the Syro-Phœnician woman; when He says to us in His providence, as He said to Mary, "Mine hour is not yet come," we must

believe that His silence or apparent refusal is for the purpose of trying our faith, and that while apparently casting us off, He is waiting to be gracious all the time. Let us not fret or be impatient, therefore, but fill up the waiting interval as He Himself would have us do. Let our importunate inward prayer be accompanied with unceasing outward effort. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." And then He will bless us up to the fulness of His own loving heart. His answer to our request will gather interest from the delay and preciousness from the difficulty of getting it; and we ourselves will be better prepared to enjoy and use it aright.

With purified faith and enlarged spiritual insight, Mary entered into her Son's design. She was brought by the gentle discipline to which He subjected her into sympathy with Him; was lifted above herself by the inspiration of the same spirit that animated Him. She now realized that He was about to do some wonderful work. At first the thought might have been vague and indistinct, but doubtless now it had matured to a strong assurance. And she seemed to comprehend that

in the performance of this mighty work human means were necessary. She did not expect, so far as we can see, that Jesus would perform a miracle by a mere word of power, by an immediate act of sovereign will. She believed that second causes and intermediate instruments were necessary. And therefore she said to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." And this circumstance of itself proves the greatness of her faith; for it is easier to rely simply upon the omnipotence of God for the accomplishment of some mighty work, than to expect that the mighty work will be brought about by causes which the dictates of reason and the established course of nature pronounce inadequate for its production. Her faith rose with the greatness of the occasion, and was a powerful factor in changing the settled order of nature.

I have remarked that we see at the marriage-feast of Cana representatives of all the different relations of domestic and social life—husband and wife, mother and son, in all probability brother and sister, friends and neighbours, host and guests, master and disciples. And here, to complete

the list, the servants are introduced to our notice. "His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." We are not, however, to suppose that these were the ordinary domestics of the house. In the primitive mountain village of Cana there was in all likelihood no hired labour. The members of each humble household did their own work unassisted. And we have reason to believe that the house in which the marriage took place was no exception. The people were too poor to afford the luxury of paid domestic service. The servants were doubtless friends, who volunteered for the occasion to minister to the wants of the guests, and to attend to the arrangements of the marriage. We are confirmed in this supposition by the name given to them in the original, which is not *doulos*, the ordinary word for servants in the New Testament, meaning always a bond-man, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, but *diakonos*, a deacon. The Church got hold of this term in after ages, and applied it, like so many other ecclesiastical terms borrowed from the heathen vocabulary, to a Christian use,

to signify a special office in connection with the Christian ministry. But at first it was a pure classical word, used to designate those who attended to the wants of guests at feasts and marriages. The *doulos*—the bond-man—however, was the normal servant in the richer households of the land, doing all the menial work. Liberty and voluntariness, which enter so essentially into our ideas of the relation, had no existence in the ancient world. There was no distinct labouring class such as we have; slavery was the normal condition of the underling, and hired service was regarded as incompatible with freedom.

Using the word servants in the sense in which the word was understood in ancient times, it is most interesting to see them taking part in the first of those wonderful works which were destined to revolutionise society, not by a violent re-arrangement of classes or orders, but by the peaceful gradual renewing and re-ordering of individual hearts. They did His bidding at the marriage-feast; and He said to them and to their class, "Henceforth

I call you not servants, but friends: for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you." The Hebrew law, while it recognised the institution of slavery, rectified many of its abuses, and never permitted the Jews to forget the wholesome lesson of sympathy, derived from the fact that they themselves were bondmen in Egypt. But it was left to Christianity to remove this curse from humanity altogether. The law of Christ has effected a wonderful transformation in all the relations and dependencies of life. It has entered into states, and changed serfs into freedmen; it has entered homes, and changed slaves into servants. It places on the basis of a common brotherhood in Christ all human relations and duties. It enables the extremes of society to kneel down together before the memorials of a Saviour's love, and there eat the same spiritual meat and drink the same spiritual drink, and in finest sympathy of heart and soul pray that they all may be one. It assures us that in Christ Jesus there is neither

bond nor free. It looks upon all Christians, whatever their earthly distinctions, as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; and enjoins them to love one another as Christ hath loved them.

In my visit to the Protestant cemetery at Florence I was greatly interested in two modest tombstones that scarcely rose above the grassy sod, near the beautiful marble monument to our great English poetess Mrs. Browning. These tombstones were placed, the one over the grave of an English general who served in India, and coming to Florence for his health died there; and the other over the grave of his man-servant who had grown grey in his service and had shortly predeceased him. Together the two old men had gone down the hill of life; almost together they had wasted away and died; and now they take the last long sleep side by side. On the tombstone of the general there is a quiet record of his rank and Christian virtues; and on that of his servant are the touching words which St. Paul wrote in his exquisite letter to Philemon, enjoining him to treat his

restored runaway slave Onesimus, "not now as a servant, but as a brother beloved." These words the general before he died had ordered to be carved upon the tomb of his servant. The great poetess who sleeps near remarked in one of her works, that "the spade of the sexton pats us all even;" and Job had said "the small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master." But there is far more in this pathetic inscription on the tomb of the servant than the mere forced equality which the tomb produces—the mere obliteration of the distinctions of life in the grave. There is implied in it Christian love and holy fellowship, and union unto everlasting life in the common Saviour. It was not death that made these two, master and servant, equal; but love stronger than death; the faithful attachment and devoted service of long years given by the one, and the deep gratitude and respect and affection given by the other in return; and above all, the common faith and love of both in Christ Jesus. They were therefore lovely in life, and in death they were not

divided. It does one good in a commercial age and nation like this, when money is made to answer all things, and the relations of social life are regulated by the principles of the market place, to come across a record of such disinterested affection and Christian devotion as this. It brought home to me very vividly the beautiful significance of the Apostle's words, and made me wish ardently that this, instead of being a solitary instance, remarkable for its peculiarity, should be a common experience; and that all the relations of master and servant, employer and employed, could be based upon the same Christian law.

For surely whatever the ungodly world may do, those who name the name of Christ ought to regard each other, in the first instance, as brothers beloved, and then, on the basis of that relationship, observe the distinctions and fulfil the duties of ordinary life. The Christian master is a brother beloved to his servant before his mastership; and the Christian servant is a brother beloved to his master before his servitude. It is not first

master and servant, and then brother beloved, but first brother beloved, and then master and servant. The higher relationship must take precedence of the lower—the enduring of the temporary. The tie of master and servant concerns only this life, and has reference only to the lower nature of man. But the tie of faith and love in Christ Jesus which binds them together has respect to the spirit, and falls under the powers of the world to come. And thus giving the right place and the full power to the higher relationship, the lower must necessarily be purified of all its sinful and selfish elements, and made all that it ought to be. If a master looks upon his servant as a brother beloved, he will treat him as a brother; he will give him his due; he will act towards him in all things in a loving, considerate spirit. And if the servant looks upon his master as a brother beloved, he will regard his interests as if they were his own. He will be faithful to his trust and devoted to his service. And such a servant will earn the distinction mentioned in those wonderful words: "Blessed

are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

CHAPTER V.

THE SIX WATERPOTS.

"And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece."—JOHN II. 6.

PERSONAL cleanliness is not usually a characteristic of the inhabitants of a warm climate. In those countries where it is most needed, there it is often most neglected. The Egyptians were distinguished above all the nations of antiquity for this quality. They anticipated in their fastidious delicacy and ceremonial purity the habits of modern and northern Europe. By the Israelites during their sojourn in Egypt the same taste was doubtless acquired; and we may trace the frequent cleansings of the person, which were enjoined under the Mosaic economy, to the lessons taught by the Egyptian priesthood. Cleanliness and godliness were combined in the sacred institutions of the two races.

We must distinguish, however, between the washings that were distinctively religious and those which were for mere ordinary purposes of purification. In the arid and dusty regions of the East, frequent ablutions would be needed for the cleansing and refreshment of the body. It was a common practice after a journey to wash the feet, which were imperfectly protected by open sandals, and to present to guests water for doing so. Bathing in streams and rivers was also a frequent habit. But these ablutions had nothing religious about them; they might be performed or not, according to the option of individuals. Under the Levitical law, however, there were certain washings which had an important religious significance, and were enforced by sanctions of a very solemn character. The Egyptians attached a sacred import to bathing in the river Nile, which they worshipped as a deity. But bathing had no place in the religious ordinances of the Jews; not because there was scarcely a stream in the Holy Land suitable for bathing during the summer, the season in which it would be chiefly desired, but specially because it did not satisfy the requirements of the law. To symbolize

the cleansing of the soul from sin, not bathing in the ordinary sense, but the more active form of washing was required. There must be, not the mere passive immersion of the body in a bath or stream, but the active use of the purifying element; the co-operation of man's own energy with the cleansing properties of the water. Not mere cleanliness, not the mere refreshment of the body, but moral purification was the object which the Jewish law had in view; and therefore it imposed no ordinances of washing in connection with meals, or the proprieties of domestic and social life, but confined its prescriptions to matters of a strictly religious nature. For this reason, too, the various rites of washing had a distinctive expiatory reference; and by their association with sacrifices and offerings, the Jew was taught to discern to its full extent the connection between the outward sign and the inward source of impurity.

One of the most remarkable vessels of the tabernacle was the laver of brass, which stood in the court between the altar of burnt-offering and the door that led to the holy place. It was composed of the metal looking-glasses of the women; that

which reflected an image of the person and concentrated attention upon personal defects or beauties, being thus converted into that which would remove all deformities and produce a true comeliness. It declared plainly by its presence before the door of the holy place the truth that without perfect purity no one could draw nigh unto God. It was used by the priests alone; and they were required to wash their hands and feet in it every time that they went into the tabernacle of the congregation. Any accidental sullying of these exposed members, any casual contact with death in any form, any little imperceptible speck of dust unavoidably contracted in the march through the wilderness, was sufficient to make the priests defiled, and so unfit to serve God in His holy place. And whether they were aware of their soiled condition or not, had they attempted to approach the inner sanctuary without previously having gone through the prescribed process of purification, they would expose themselves to the penalty of death.

The laver was perpetuated into the Temple of Solomon, and doubtless existed in the restored Temple of Herod in the days of our Lord; but

after the Babylonish captivity its use was to a large extent superseded by a variety of unauthorised washings introduced into the sphere of daily life. Cups and platters, brazen vessels and beds, were washed as a matter of ritual observance. Minute regulations were laid down in the Mishna as to the formal washing of the hands before meals, and several other acts of ablution which the tradition of the elders had added to the law of Moses. Our Saviour denounced these unwarranted Pharisaical observances as perversions of the spirit and design of the Divine commandment, tending to draw away men's thoughts from spiritual realities to mere bodily exercises which profited nothing, and to connect impurity with outward actions only, and not with inward desires and feelings—with the food that entered into the body rather than with the moral things that proceeded out of a man's heart.

The six waterpots of stone in the house at Cana were meant to be in the private dwelling what the laver was in the Temple service. They were not used like common water-vessels to contain the ordinary supply of the household for drinking or cooking purposes; they were consecrated exclu-

sively for ceremonial rites—for the washing of cups, and platters, and couches, and of the hands and persons of the family and their visitors. The explanation which St. John thinks it necessary to give of the use of these jars, shows that he had clearly before his mind the case of readers of his gospel who were not familiar with Jewish customs. We are struck with several peculiarities of these water-pots. They were not made by the potter out of clay, but were hewn by the carver out of the compact limestone of which the rocks in the neighbourhood were formed. They were constructed of stone as the ecclesiastical canon enjoins fonts to be, since that material is less liable to impurity. In all likelihood, therefore, they were not closed-up jars with a narrow orifice, as they are usually represented in paintings, like the wine amphoras of clay which we see among the ruins of ancient cities, such as Pompeii and Rome; but large massive stone basins or tazzas, with wide mouths, like those which the Greeks and Romans constructed of marble, alabaster, or porphyry for their numerous lustrations, of which we see splendid specimens in our great art museums, and especially in the

Vatican sculpture gallery. This shape would approximate more closely to that of the sacred laver in the Temple, which they would doubtless take as a model for these domestic utensils, intended to form a link of connection between the ceremonies of public and private worship.

Owing to their large size and great weight they were not movable, but were fixed in one spot, in the hall or vestibule, or near the entrance of the house, in a position analogous to that of the laver in the Temple, which was also a fixture. Indeed, whenever the laver is noticed it is always accompanied with the addition "and his foot," or the solid base upon which it rested. There was no provision made for carrying it, like the other vessels of the sanctuary; it had no rings or staves attached to it. Of course as a fact it was borne from place to place along with the tabernacle in the journeyings of the Israelites in the wilderness; but as a type, the studious omission of any notice in its case of the usual means of carriage, and the emphasis laid upon its possession of a base, would indicate that it had a fixed definite place, and was not to partake of the migratory

character of the other parts of the sanctuary. This circumstance, as Mr. Soldan has well shown, was meant to be typically significant, doubtless, of the fixedness and full accomplishment of the work of regeneration on earth. The other vessels of the sanctuary were types of heavenly things, and they were carried about to indicate that they were temporary symbols of everlasting realities; but the laver typified a work which should take place only on earth. Here only can the soul be purified from its stains. The passage from this world to the next can effect no moral change. A corrupt nature translated to heaven—were such a thing possible—would remain corrupt still. In this life, therefore, the process of regeneration must be completed; and cleansed here, the soul is cleansed for evermore. The material type exhausts its spiritual meaning on earth, and therefore the vessel is described without rings or staves as a fixture, and without the vails or coverings which the other vessels possessed to indicate that their higher meaning and use were concealed in this world. Our Lord Himself, when teaching Nicodemus the truths connected with regeneration, speaks of them as "earthly things,"

—things that take place on earth. And there can be no doubt that the waterpots which served the same purpose in the private ritual of the Jews were made fixtures after the example of the laver, although those who introduced these waterpots may have had no idea of the typical significance of the circumstance.

Another thing that strikes us is the enormous capacity of these waterpots. Those at the marriage feast are said to have been capable of containing from sixteen to twenty-four gallons each. In this respect, too, they imitate to a certain extent the laver and the brazen sea of Solomon, whose dimensions were enormous. The frequent ablutions of the Mosaic and of the subsequent traditional law required a large supply of water. Vessels so massive as these must have lasted for many generations; and there is a probability that some trace of them, or of others like them, of the same date, may have survived down to a comparatively late period. Dr. Clarke, the great traveller, mentions that during his visit to Cana, he saw among the ruins of the church built by the Empress Helena over the spot where the

marriage-feast was supposed to have been held, a number of large massive stone pots, lying about unheeded, as ancient relics with whose original use the inhabitants were not acquainted. We are told, however, that later travellers found these relics utilised by the resident Greek monks, who exhibited an old stone vessel as one of the identical pots which contained the miraculous wine. It was shown, among others, to Lamartine. But that there should be even one remaining in the place is not consistent with the tradition, that in the time of the Crusades the whole six jars were brought to France, where one of them is still said to exist in the museum of Angers. The whole story, however, is a monkish fabrication, got up to foster the relic-worship of a corrupt Church. It is something more than a mere accident that has consigned to forgetfulness or surrounded with doubt all objects connected with the earthly pilgrimage of our Lord. They are lost in obscurity or oblivion, because of our proneness to pay that adoration to the thing, which is due only to Him by whom all things were created, and who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

The guests at the marriage feast had made use of the waterpots at the threshold when they entered the house. Each removed the dust and the stains of travel by this ceremonial washing. And large as was the quantity of water which the pots contained, the company was so numerous that the whole six were emptied. This was the condition in which they were when Jesus had recourse to them. He did not find fault with the existence of these pots, or with the ceremonial observances connected with them, although on other occasions He had denounced the whole system of traditional will-worship which they represented. We have every reason to believe that the family of Cana was an exceptionally pious one. The members of this household were doubtless among the few who waited for the consolation of Israel. Jesus embodied all their highest thoughts and hopes; and therefore when He laid the spell of His presence upon them their hearts' loyalty was stirred, and they were ready to follow Him. They conformed to the popular customs; but these customs doubtless meant more to them than to others. They penetrated with a deep spiritual

insight beneath the outward forms and ceremonies in which the majority of their countrymen sought a substitute for the religion of the heart. In the Jewish usages regarding certain kinds of food, and certain ritual ablutions, they discerned some glimpse of God's design to separate their souls from sin and to purify their nature. And not satisfied with the mere mechanical observance, they must have longed, in their more quickened moods, for some Divine power to make and keep them, not ceremonially, but really, pure. As touching the righteousness of the law, the household of Cana were blameless; but, doubtless, in the continual washings of the waterpots at their threshold, they were continually confessing their shortcomings and imperfections, and seeking a truer righteousness than they could work out by their own merits. For this reason, probably, while Jesus rebuked so severely the ceremonial washings of the Pharisees, who had a scrupulous anxiety to cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, although their inward part was full of excess, extortion, and all uncleanness, He had not a word to say against the use which the family of Cana

made of their waterpots. In their case He employed, not the destructive, but the constructive argument. He showed them a more excellent way, and employed their waterpots as the vehicles of His miracle.

There is a profound significance in this last fact, of which we are apt to lose sight. Jesus might have performed His miracle in some other way, apart from those waterpots altogether. There are many conceivable modes besides this which He might have made use of. But the fact that He connected His miracle of grace with these vessels of the law shows to us in a striking manner the principle upon which He uniformly proceeds in His operations. In the natural world, He makes the green leaf of spring to shoot out of the faded leaf of autumn, and all vegetable life to grow out of the mould of vegetable decay. In the human world, He makes use of things already in existence for His new purposes. To Moses He appeared in the indigenous bush of the desert; and, with the shepherd's rod which he held in his hand, He enabled him to accomplish the signs and wonders through which the deliverance of Israel

was effected. In the construction of the tabernacle He employed the gold, silver, precious stones, and other valuable materials of which the Israelites had spoiled the Egyptians. Many of the laws and customs given to His own people were cast into the mould of Egyptian laws and customs. The Israelites spoiled the Egyptians not only of their material, but even of many of their spiritual things; and the careful student will discover a very close resemblance between many of the rites and ceremonies in the Jewish and Egyptian religions. The Israelites took possession of the cities and fields of the Canaanites, after the conquest and division of Palestine, and employed all the resources and advantages of the country, which the aboriginal inhabitants had perverted into means of wickedness, into means of grace for the worship and service of a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The prophetical aspirations of the Jews, their expectations of the Messiah, took shape and utterance from the circumstances of their political history. They were run into the mould of

current events. The promises of the future were not painted on empty air, but were arrayed in the substantial forms of the present. The young man at Dothan saw with his natural eye the chariots and horsemen of Ben-hadad sent to capture his master; and Elisha opened his spiritual eye to see horses and chariots of fire, encamped round the mountain to guard them.

Our Saviour's birth came into ordinary human nature; our Saviour's life into ordinary human history; and the great salvation which He wrought was accomplished through the treachery, false witness, and crucifixion of man. When Christianity became the dominant religion, it absorbed and utilised all that was excellent in the previous religions. The gold which had been employed in the service of false gods was cleansed from its pollution, and helped to construct the golden candlesticks of the Christian Church. The frankincense and myrrh which had been burned as incense upon the altar of polytheism, or employed to embalm the mummy of a dead religion, were used, like the spikenard of Mary, to anoint the person of our Lord and to shed their fragrance

upon His atoning death. The action of the Magi, in bringing their gifts to the feet of the infant Jesus, was significant of all the religions before Christ bringing what was truest, purest, and most enduring in them, to be made still more precious and enduring by the excelling glory of the gospel. The very materials of the pagan temples were taken to construct and adorn the Christian churches. The temple of Diana at Ephesus contributed some of its most precious marbles to the formation of the Church of St. Sophia at Constantinople; and the candlestick removed out of its place in Ephesus, according to the threatening of the Lord of that church, helped to construct another candlestick in Western Europe, on which the light of truth shone for a time more brightly. In the city of Rome, there is not a single ancient church which does not owe its form and materials to those of some temple or heathen court that formerly existed on its site; and the visitor will find, in nearly all the churches, pillars, vases, or mosaics taken from the shrines of Jupiter, or Minerva, or Neptune. The military roads, which the Romans made for the passage of their armies,

facilitated the journeyings of the apostles in their peaceful mission of preaching the gospel to every creature. The conquests of Alexander and Cæsar made the crooked places straight and the rough places smooth for the grander conquests of the Cross. The Roman law was a schoolmaster that led the nations to Christ; and the world-wide Roman empire prepared the way of the Lord, for the establishment of that kingdom which shall extend from sea to sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth. The very course which the gospel took in converting the world was determined by the demand of the Roman army for tents in their encampments, and consequently by the wanderings of St. Paul the tent-maker in search of his ordinary work. In short, we find it to be a universal principle in religion, to accommodate itself to a state of things already existing—to make a heavenly use of ordinary things—just as the spirit of man makes the bodily organs to minister to its spiritual wants, and mints the very waste or dross of the body which is carried away by the breath into speech, the coinage of the soul. He who in the natural

world gathers up the fragments and allows nothing to be wasted, working up the refuse of one effete substance into the glory of another active substance, has also utilised in the spiritual world all the right products of human thought, and the good results of human experience, and "out of the forms of the alien or the false has produced the power of the true."

That the first miracle of the gospel should rest as its basis upon the ceremonialism of the law is a striking proof of the closeness and subtilty of the connection that exists between all parts of revelation, as one harmonious scheme of grace. Augustine pertinently says: "Novum testamentum in vetere latet; vetus e novo patet." The New Testament is concealed in the Old; the Old Testament is revealed in the New. The waterpots at the feast were massive stone vessels, calculated to last for a very long time, and to stand almost any amount of wear and tear. They were like the solid tables of stone engraved by the finger of God, which were treasured up in the ark of the testimony. And in this respect they typified the enduring nature of the Jewish economy. No

doubt in its external forms this economy has passed away, but in its essential elements it still survives, and is brought forward into permanent union with the Christian dispensation. The old and the new covenant are not two antagonistic systems, placed in sharpest contrast, but complementary, so that every characteristic of the one finds its counterpart and corresponding reality in the other. Jesus Himself was foretold by Jewish prophecy; and His incarnation was the fulfilment of the whole course of Jewish history. When He appeared, He assumed the flesh and relations of a Jew, was born under the law of Moses, honoured all its ordinances, and lived all His days a Jew. He taught that those who sat in the seat of Moses should be duly reverenced; He declared that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. His disciples were Jews, and men believed that in Him the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had fulfilled the promises made to the fathers. The apostles worshipped in the temple; and the Hebrew Christians continued to cultivate the ancient ritual. Their veneration for the customs of Moses had not been lessened

by their realisation of the Messiahship of Jesus. And the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews showed to them that they were compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, and that so far from being separated from the glorious past, and obliged to forego all part or lot in the venerable and sacred memories of their race, they by their faith and endurance were following in the right way the example of, and were brought into truest fellowship with, their most illustrious ancestors. Judaism may therefore be regarded as the vessel that contained Christianity, the poorer element of the law being converted into the richer element of the gospel. All the institutions and ideas which distinguished the Jewish dispensation still remain in all their integrity, but are invested with a higher meaning and a more spiritual interpretation. In this respect some have seen a typical significance in the number of the waterpots at Cana. The number six is regarded as symbolical of a preparatory state—before seven, the number of perfection—as the six days of labour are preparatory to the Sabbath of rest. The Jewish dispensation was thus preparatory to the Christian, the law to

the gospel, the letter to the spirit, as the six waterpots were preparatory to the miracle of Cana.

But the connection of the waterpots with the first miracle of Christ conveys in a symbolical form a yet deeper truth. The guests at Cana were not only keeping the natural ordinance of God in all its purity, but they were also obeying as far as they knew the religious law of God given in His holy Word. They were at a marriage; and previous to the feast they washed their hands in the water appointed for their purification. The kingdom of heaven therefore first opened not only upon what was best in the natural moral life, but also upon what was best spiritually in human attainment at the time. The waterpots represented the best side of the Jewish faith and life—all that man had succeeded in reaching hitherto in his honest striving after obedience to Divine revelation. But the emptiness of these waterpots declared their insufficiency. Just as the natural joy of life typified by the wine came to an end, so the religious hope typified by the water also failed.

The very number and vast capacity of the waterpots indicated their unsatisfyingness. However frequent or copious the ablutions prescribed by the Pharisaic law, they could not effect their true purpose. The laver of the tabernacle and temple had to be resorted to again and again by the priests, the cleansing processes under the Levitical law had to be continually repeated; for the worshippers were never purged thereby—the "conscience of sins" still remained.

As the water employed in all the ceremonial cleansings is a mineral substance, having no organic life, its purification is only superficial and transitory; so the law which it represented could make nothing perfect; its righteousness was only outward, affecting the conduct, but not penetrating to the source of corruption, not touching the heart. It was appropriate, therefore, that Jesus should meet this want and remedy it; that the felt insufficiency of the highest attainments of the law should form the lowest starting-point of the first miracle of the gospel. The waterpots had proclaimed only the need of washing; Jesus would now reveal the way and impart the power.

He would show that not by an outward ceremony, but by an inward life, a man was to be effectually purified; and that life He was about to communicate. Wine was the symbol of it; and this is an organic substance, the product of life. It is taken internally. It communicates directly with the vital powers; it stimulates them to throw off every symptom of disease, every source of impurity. Life is the great purifying principle. Local disease can best be removed by strengthening the general constitution; and the more life, the more healing and cleansing power. What penetrates to the life and affects it must necessarily be a more effectual purifying agent than what only touches the skin. In this respect, therefore, we see the profound significance of changing the water of the waterpots of the law into the wine of grace—changing the outward purification of the dead ceremony into the inward purification of the gospel of life.

But there is more still in the transformation. The wine was the symbol of a still more effectual cleansing power. It spoke eloquently in its origin—being the sacrifice of the vine, the life-blood

of the grape, crushed out of it when trodden under foot of man in the winepress—of that atoning blood of Him who is the True Vine poured forth on the Cross, which cleanseth from all sin. For this reason, our Lord employed it in the Holy Supper, which signifies our communion and fellowship with Him in His sufferings and death. The divers washings and purifyings of the Jews were associated, I have said, with expiatory sacrifices; but the processes were separate—the altar of burnt-offering was distinct from the laver. But in the miracle of Cana they are combined; the water is changed into wine, and that wine is the symbol of the shed blood of the Redeemer. Over the joyous marriage festival at the commencement of His career, as I have already said, rested the shadow of Gethsemane and Calvary. Jesus came not by water only, but by water and blood. The fountain of life in Christ crucified is combined with the cleansing stream of death and judgment. In the death of His own Son God has judged and condemned sin in the flesh; and in Him we have been plunged into the deep waters of death, in order that the body of sin

might be destroyed. We owe our cleanness, and subsequent fitness for God's presence, to the blessed fact of our having been buried with Him in this costly baptism, and raised with Him from it to newness of life. And just as the miracle of the conversion of water into wine was one act, done once effectually for all, in striking contrast with the continual ineffectual washings of the Levitical law, so by one offering Jesus hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. He that is washed by this inward process of regeneration needeth not save to wash his feet. His nature is purified, and he needs only to cleanse himself from the defilements which he contracts in his walk through the world.

Our Lord Himself explained this significance of the miracle in His discourse to Nicodemus. There is a close and intimate connection between these two incidents. The one did not follow the other immediately in chronological order; but there is a subtle connection of inward spiritual significance between the two, for the sake of which I believe the inspired writer was guided

to associate them together. Just as the sermon upon Christ, as the bread of the soul, followed immediately in explanation of the inward spiritual meaning of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, so our Lord's address to Nicodemus about the new birth and the new life followed immediately, in explanation of the inward spiritual meaning of the conversion of water into wine at Cana. The blessing of the marriage, the source of all human relations, and the means by which the Church is formed and replenished, is followed by the teaching of the new birth, as the source of a holy life here and a heavenly life hereafter. It was virtually of the conversion of the water of the law into the wine of the gospel that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. He was a representative Jew—a Pharisee, a ruler—being, according to human estimation, a righteous man. He had been washing his hands, and cleansing himself all his life, in the waterpots of the Levitical ceremonies and institutions, and fancied that he was clean. He recognised Jesus only as a teacher come from God, conscious that he had something to learn from Him, but ignorant that

he was totally corrupt and needed salvation, But Jesus tells him that all this cleansing is only superficial. He must go back to the beginning; he must be born again, not of water only, but of the Spirit—not of formal observances only, but of spiritual powers—else he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. He must have a new nature to fit him for the new creation of God. The mere washing in the outward forms and observances will not avail: he must take into his soul the wine of spiritual life, the very life-blood of the kingdom of heaven.

The waterpots of Cana, notwithstanding their massive size and enduring material, have long ago disappeared, and not a vestige of them remains. The manner of purifying which pertained to them has been changed; but at the gospel feast which the marriage of Cana represents, with its continual presence of the Lord, and its continual relays of guests and disciples in each generation, there is still a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, at which we are commanded to wash. The Church is the bride, the Lamb's wife, which He has united to Himself by faith, and

which He is sanctifying and cleansing with the washing of water by the Word, in order to present her to Himself a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. And the two great ordinances of the Church, baptism and the Lord's supper, speak to all its members of the need of cleansing, and the effectual means provided for the purpose. The baptismal font in the lowly chapel, and the baptistery connected with the magnificent cathedral, alike remind us of the great truth which our Lord taught the ruler of the Jews. And the sacramental wine on the Lord's table, as oft as we partake of it, tells us in the most solemn and emphatic manner, that not by the outward washing of water, but by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ, can we be partakers of His life and of His holiness. Let these two ordinances be to us in a far higher and truer sense, as becometh the Gospel, what the waterpots were to the Jews, the means and seals of our spiritual purification, of the entire consecration of all that we are and all that we have to the service of "Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own

blood, and made us kings and priests unto God." Let us connect the water of the baptismal font with the wine of the Lord's table, the cleansing of regeneration with the Divine provision of our souls. Let the miracle of their perfect blending together be wrought in us. Let the blood that cleanses us from all sin be drink indeed to our souls, so that all through our life we may sit at the marriage feast of Jesus, and sup with Him and He with us.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HELP OF THE SERVANTS.

"Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water, and they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it."—JOHN II. 7, 8.

IN the miracle of Cana, the help of the servants was an essential factor. Their faith was necessary. The mother of Jesus had prepared the way by her sympathy with her Son's design; and now the servants were ready to obey implicitly the instructions of Jesus. It was not without reason that Mary had said to them, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." She expected that something very remarkable, something out of the ordinary course, would be done—something that might provoke at first incredulity and opposition; and therefore she guarded them against any shock or surprise. And well did they learn the lesson. They might have objected to what seemed so

foolish and capricious a proceeding as pouring water into empty vessels. Why should they have been taken away from the useful work in which they were engaged, ministering to the necessities of the guests, to perform this work of supererogation? The guests had all already washed their hands, and therefore no more water was required for ritual purposes. And yet they received and obeyed the command in respectful silence. They did not stop to argue or question. They did not seek any explanation. They made haste and delayed not to keep Christ's commandment. Something in His look, in His voice, in His manner, awed and impressed them with the consciousness of a higher world. They felt instinctively that they were in the presence of One who had only to order and it should be done. There may have been a sudden unveiling to them of the indwelling glory of the supernatural, which He usually concealed beneath the appearance of an ordinary man—the Shekinah in the earthly tabernacle, and from which, as from a never-intermitting fountain, proceeded the outward miracle-working power, as shown in distinct acts. Such a display of the glory of the Only-

Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, as flashed out before the disciples on the mount of transfiguration,—as caused the multitude, who came to seize Him in the garden of Gethsemane, to fall back to the ground appalled and helpless, may have been given to them. But whatever aid they may have received from the presence of Jesus Himself, there can be no doubt that their silent and unhesitating obedience, in the midst of so much that was fitted to excite incredulity and even ridicule, was a signal proof of their faith. It rose with the greatness of the occasion and with the emergency of the crisis. These servants were now to be employed as instruments in altering the settled order of nature ; and in such a remarkable crisis, it might have been necessary that they should have been wrought up to the highest pitch of confidence in Him who "hath chosen things which are not to bring to nought things that are." The first miracle of our Lord thus brought out the great fact that the faith of man lies at the foundation of all the work of God for him ; that faith is an essential element in every miracle of grace. Human unbelief restrains the Almighty Arm ; but

faith is the miracle within that overcomes all incredulity of reason and opposition in the heart, and thus prepares the way for the miracle without that removes mountains in the world. Man's acquiescence must go along with God's omnipotence. His people must be made willing in the day of His power. His miracles are not displays of arbitrary force capriciously exerted. They are conditioned by moral considerations, and can be wrought only in accordance with the strict laws which regulate the spiritual world. The forces of heaven, like the electric forces of earth, uniformly choose the path of least resistance, and require good conductors for their beneficent transmission.

But besides human faith, human work was also needed in the miracle of Cana. The help of the servants was, in its own way, as necessary for the performance of the miracle as the power of Jesus. They had to fill the waterpots with water, and to draw out and give to the governor of the feast. The initial process and the final result were alike accomplished through their labour. From beginning to end, all through, they had to assist Jesus in doing His mighty work. The miracle was thus

wrought in accordance with the wise law of labour which God had imposed, that in the sweat of his face man shall eat bread. And just as the natural wine in the vineyard is the result of the cooperation of the forces of nature and the toils of man, so the miraculous wine of Cana was the joint product of Christ's Divine power and of human skill and labour. And here, in this first act of the new creation, we see the immense difference between it and the first act of the old creation. At the old creation God said, "Let there be light." The light brought order out of the confusion and life out of the death of the world. It commenced that wonderful process of vivifying and arrangement which has made the world what it is. It flashed forth in the beautiful forms and hues of nature, and it took shape in the vine, which is a living embodiment of sunlight—a tree of light as well as of life. And all this by a mere word costing nothing. But when God came to redeem the world—to restore the creation which sin had disordered and destroyed, to make all its old things new—He came Himself under the laws and limitations which He had

ordained, under the sentence of toil and sorrow and death which He had pronounced upon it. It was with the sorrow of His soul and the sweat of His face that He began and carried on His new creation. The mighty miracles, with which He rolled back the curse, were works that came under the same law of toil and care and pain to which all man's work is subjected. St. Matthew significantly says, after recording several wonderful miracles, that "Himself bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows."

The first miracle which He wrought struck the keynote of all that followed. We see in it, if we search deeply enough, signs of the toil and travail of soul through which He accomplished all His work of redemption. It was a festal occasion ; but underneath its happiness we see the shadow of the curse and the cross—below the glad tones of the epithalamium we hear the sad refrain of the solemn requiem. We see the curse in the want of wine, and the cross in the saying of Jesus, "Mine hour is not yet come." Jesus felt deeply for the young couple, in the sudden gloom that had come over their joy

through the failure of the wine; and it was out of this sympathy that the miracle, like a rainbow on a dark cloud, blossomed. And in the premonition of His own hour of death, which the miracle brought vividly before Him and helped to accomplish, we see that it was not without sorrow of soul that Jesus performed the wonderful act. And in this travail the servants participated. They did all they could to assist Him; and suffering with Christ in the toil and sorrow that went before the miracle, they reigned with Christ in the triumph that followed. In the first creation God wrought alone, unaided by man or angel; but in the new creation He required the help of men and angels. Angels strengthened and ministered to Him, and human beings helped Him by their faith and labour. Not by His own word and power merely, but also by human effort and suffering, is His new creation rising to its ultimate perfection. He gives to each human being the opportunity and the honour of being a fellow-worker with Him, in the field of his own heart and life, and in the field of the world. The cross is ours as well as Christ's, and the joy that

was set before Him is set before us too. It is the sword of the Lord and of Gideon that conquers. It is the song of Moses and of the Lamb that celebrates the victory. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

But while we see this deeper meaning in the help of the servants, we cannot suppose that the act which they performed was an irrelevant thing—an accidental or capricious choice, for which any other act would have done equally well. There must be a fitness in the proceeding becoming an all-wise and all-gracious Providence, dealing with reasonable creatures, with favoured friends and servants. As the whole miracle is manifestly an acted parable, may we not consider this subordinate feature of it, the command of Jesus to the servants to fill the waterpots with water, to be of an emblematical nature? The emptiness of these ceremonial vessels was significant of the emptiness of the Jewish rites. They had in themselves no efficacy; they could make nothing perfect. The Jewish law without Christ was like a cipher—

which however added to one another in a row—however multiplied—gives no increase in value. However often it was obeyed—however frequently its rites were performed—no real spiritual benefit accrued. The prescribed purifications only proclaimed the need of cleansing; the way in which they were carried out kept before the minds of the worshippers what was wanted rather than what was supplied. The empty waterpots, standing in a row at the threshold of the house, resembled the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Levitical institution. They spoke of realities in the spiritual world which they symbolised; but it was in these realities, and not in the mere mechanical rites themselves, that the purifying efficacy resided. In themselves, they were destitute of power to remove the stain of sin; they had no real, intrinsic tendency to make the man who faithfully observed them a better man—a new creature. No doubt these typical rites could remove typical uncleanness. Ceremonial defilements, which excluded men from the outward worship of God, could be taken away by ceremonial observances, which sanctified "to the purifying of the flesh." But as regards interior

and spiritual uncleanness—the pardon of sin and the purification of the soul—these outward rites were altogether powerless. The taint contracted by the touch of a dead body, rendering the flesh unclean, could be removed by the washing of the waterpots; but they had no water to wash away the evil thoughts and feelings which are the sign of death in the soul, which reveal the mortal corruption of our spiritual nature, and by which not the flesh, but the spiritual consciousness of men is made unclean. In regard to these, we must use the words which our immortal dramatist put into the lips of Lady Macbeth—"Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

But the emptiness of the waterpots declares not only the inherent insufficiency of the Levitical ceremonies, but also the induced insufficiency occasioned by the Pharisaism of the Jews. They had emptied the institutions of the law of all their meaning by their abuse of them. They had made them powerless by their unbelief and selfishness — their formal perfunctory obedience —to instruct and benefit. As a man by pouring

into a full cup succeeds, by his superfluous effort, in displacing some of the water that is already in it, so by their works of supererogation, by their traditions of the fathers, they, instead of lending additional sanctions to the law of God, had only made it void, of none effect. Those waterpots themselves were human inventions, commandments of men, superfluous and unauthorised additions to the ceremonial law; and the effect of them was to draw away the attention, from the inner purity of the soul, to the outward purity of the body, obtained by the mere washing of the hands—to teach that purity is determined not by what is within, but by what is without.

A further thought is suggested by the emptiness of the waterpots. It tells us that the institutions of Judaism are now emptied of the significance they once possessed. They have served their purpose, in sustaining the religious life of a chosen race, through whose instruction and discipline all nations were to be blessed. They introduced into their thought and language types and emblems of religious truth, without which the revelation of God to the world would

have been hardly intelligible. They were the shadows of heavenly things; witnesses of grand and enduring realities behind the veil. But the fulness of time has come, and they have passed away. They belonged to the childhood of religion, which is only able to realise things through such mediums—by the teaching of such object-lessons, such a picture alphabet; and now the full-grown religious man, trained by them in his pupilage, has discarded them in passing to the higher school of Christianity, where he has a firmer grasp and a fuller possession of the truth. And these inarticulate symbols, no longer used, emptied of all present purpose and prophetic meaning, are in the system of revelation what the empty bud-scales are in the natural world; those coverings which once sheltered and nourished the leaves and flowers imprisoned within them, but which fall off and strew the ground when the foliage and blossoms are fully developed in summer. They are empty waterpots at the threshold of God's house, which we pass by with a backward glance, as we enter into the holiest place of living realities within the rent veil.

The action of Jesus, therefore, in filling the waterpots with water, indicates that Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it; not to break off from the old rites, but to fill them with meaning and power. He restored the true sense of the law in the wonderful sermon on the Mount; and He satisfied its requirements by His own obedience. He filled up the law in His teaching, and He fulfilled the law in His life. He put into the letter of the word its proper significance. The want which the waterpots proclaimed He supplied; the element of which they were empty He imparted. He connected these waterpots with the enduring spiritual dispensation of the Gospel: and showed that, however the form might vary, however the measure of man's knowledge of religious truth might vary, religious truth itself remained invariable through all ages. The institutions of Judaism belong to Christianity in this sense. They are old, effete forms of the same truth. Their temporary purpose has long been served, but they have still their permanent place and position in revelation. They are ours now in a

truer and higher sense than they ever belonged to the Jews. The grand numeral has been added to the ciphers, and their value is untold. We have the tabernacle fulfilled in the tabernacling of Christ in our flesh; the ark of the covenant in the union of God and man in Him; the altar of burnt-offering in the atonement of the cross; the altar of incense in Christ's continual intercession at the right hand of the throne on high; the golden candlestick in the light that His Spirit imparts to our darkened souls; the table of shewbread in the spiritual food with which He satisfies our hunger after righteousness; and the laver in the blood that streamed from His pierced side, which cleanseth from all sin. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth, living reality, came by Jesus Christ.

And as He did Himself so He commanded others to do. He would have His servants fill the water-pots with water, invest the letter of the word with its sacred significance, put the element of truth into the empty form. As it has been well said, it is the duty of the Church and its members in obedience to the

Divine command, and in imitation of Christ's example, to fill up the full measure of the true meaning of God's law, and to fulfil it by teaching and doing what it really requires. And how useful are the forms and aspects of the old covenant, which Christ filled with meaning, in comprehending the spiritual truths of the Gospel. They are moulds in which to cast our conceptions of heavenly things. We understand the doctrines of grace more clearly, when we see them in the light shed upon them by the old rites and ceremonies. We not only put the Gospel into the symbolic institutions, but we also take it out of them, and it acquires in the process a new and richer meaning.

In our version it would seem as if the servants had done more than they were told. Jesus commanded them only to fill the water-pots with water, and they filled them up to the brim. But in the original it is the same word that is used in both cases, and it signifies to fill to overflowing. The servants only did what they were asked to do. As regards the mere working of the miracle, this command would remove all

appearance of deception. It was not a small quantity of water that was poured in, remaining down at the bottom of the pots concealed from view, where it might have been mingled with the dregs of the wine of the feast by sleight of hand, and so have imparted to it a slight flavour and colour of wine which might have passed muster. The water-pots were filled to the brim; the quantity was so enormous that there could be no possibility of collusion; there could be no shadow of suspicion as to the nature of the original element. The water was seen before the eye of the spectator in the very mouth of the vessels—bright, clear, sparkling in the sunlight—reflecting the objects around. But there were higher reasons than this for filling the water-pots up to the brim. By some, it is considered an objectionable feature in the miracle, that all this enormous quantity of water should have been converted into wine, as if Christ were placing temptation in the way of men, and encouraging them in riot and dissipation; and they try to get rid of the stumbling-block by the supposition that the wine possessed no intoxicating power,

was a perfectly harmless beverage even if drunk to excess. But we are not shut up to the conclusion that all the water in the water-pots was changed into wine. The force of the words would favour the idea rather, that only the water that was drawn from the vessels underwent the marvellous transmutation, and that the process took place in the transition.

But even admitting the notion, which is all but universal, that the whole contents of the six jars were turned into wine, we are not obliged to infer that all that immense quantity of wine was consumed at the feast. Indeed we have every reason to believe—both from the character of the company, and the restraining influence of Christ's presence and example, that only a small portion would be disposed of on this occasion; and the rest in all likelihood would be stored up for future use. May we not look upon this miraculous wine as a present made by Jesus to the young couple—in conformity with the practice of the people of the place to bring useful gifts to a newly-wedded pair, and thus help them in beginning

their housekeeping? As Elisha multiplied the widow's pot of oil, filled all the vessels which she brought to overflowing from the contents of the one vessel, and as this most abundant supply was sold to the merchant to pay her debt, and to be a provision for future need; so we may suppose this greater than Elisha changed the water in the water-pots of Cana into wine, and gave the vast quantity to the young couple, not only for the present entertainment of their guests, to discharge the obligations of hospitality, but also for their own future use.

And on this supposition we should see no difficulty or objection in the enormous quantity of wine made. It is only what we might have expected at the hands of Jesus. He was no mean, niggardly giver. He did things in a royal way. The miracle symbolises not only the qualitative, but also the quantitative excellence of the Gospel. It strikes the key-note of Christ's ministry as a generous ministry, of His redemption as a plenteous redemption. He came not merely to give us new life, but also more abundant life; not only to change our

nature, but to make it richer, fuller, wider. "Where sin abounded His grace did much more abound"; or as it should be more correctly rendered, Where sin multiplied, grace did over-abound; the term is superlative, not comparative. He loved much, and therefore He gave much. All His gifts were the utterances of the largest and most generous heart that ever beat, the expressions of thoughts and feelings too deep for words, too deep even for tears. With Him there was never any cautious calculation. The profusion, the generosity, the very waste of His love meets us everywhere in the story of His life. His sacrifice of Himself stands forth before the universe as the very type of prodigality and extravagance. The satisfaction which He rendered to the offended justice of God was no bare equivalent for human sin. It was more than plenary; it was superabundant. And the peace which He gives is like a river; and the righteousness which He imparts is as the waves of the sea. We see the lavishfulness of His generosity in the field of nature. More in every department is produced than is needed. Everywhere the river of life overflows its banks.

The fruit-tree is loaded with blossoms in spring, of which but a small quantity comparatively is required to form the fruit in autumn. We owe our daily bread itself to this extravagance of nature; for if the corn produced only a sufficient number of seeds barely to perpetuate the species, there would be no annual miracle of the multiplication of the loaves in the harvest. All the ministrations of nature to our physical wants are adorned with a plenitude of superfluous beauty, which seems, if she contemplated no higher end, to justify the utilitarian question: "To what purpose is this waste?" In the face of all this, what poor and dishonouring ideas do the best of us cherish of the grace of God. We are constantly putting upon it the limits and disabilities of our own selfish nature. We are straitened in ourselves; and we measure the fullness of the great Giver of every good and perfect gift, not by the sea-like depths of His infinitude, but by the cistern-like shallows of our own straitened being. And this indisposition of the mind to shape to itself such disinterested and unbounded goodness is the great obstacle of faith, which it is the great purpose of

the Gospel to remove, by not only revealing to us the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus, but also making us willing to receive them. And as He Himself thus fills every receptacle of His grace to the brim; as He supplies our need, not according to the limit of our thoughts and desires, but exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the riches of His glory, so He would have us imitate Him in this god-like virtue. He commands us as His servants to fill everything within our power to the brim with the fullness of our love, the freeness of our generosity. "Give," He says, "and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and running over, shall men give unto your bosom."

At what precise point the wonderful transubstantiation took place—whether it was in the filling of the water-pots with water, or in the transferring of their contents into smaller vessels—we are not told. There is a veil over this as over all creative acts, and we cannot trace beginnings. Severn, the friend of Keats, painted in Rome a picture of the Marriage of Cana; but he did not complete it. He represents the servants in it

pouring the water out of one vessel into another. The water issues from the vessel clear as crystal; but in the arc formed by its descent it is refracted into a red colour. The painter was always very proud of showing to visitors this trick of his art; and I among the number admired the picture. But whatever might be thought of this feature, there could be no doubt that the painter caught the true idea of the transformation. We have every reason to believe, as I have already said, that the water was changed into wine when it was drawn out by the servants. In this respect the miracle of Cana would follow the analogy of previous and subsequent miracles. The barrel of meal and the cruse of oil in the home of the widow of Zarephath was multiplied by Elijah, not all at once, but day by day, as the necessities of the household required it during the famine. The oil in the widow's pot was increased, under Elisha's mediation, not in the pot itself, but when she poured it, one after another, into the vessels borrowed to receive it. Jesus Himself afterwards, in His miracle of the loaves and fishes, did not produce at once from the provision of the lad, which

served as the nucleus and starting-point of the miracle, the whole quantity required to satisfy the hunger of the multitude, but multiplied it as it was passed on from hand to hand by the disciples. And thus it was, we may well suppose, in the present case. What the servants drew out of the water-pots as water, they received into their vessels as wine. The miracle was therefore the crowning reward of human toil in all its stages, initiatory and final. Not only was it needful that the servants should pour water into the pots, but also that they should draw the water out of them, before the miracle could be performed. Man had to do his utmost, to exhaust his strength and skill, to labour to the very end in the sweat of his face, ere the Divine power, without which these efforts would be useless, could be put forth to work out the appropriate blessing. There was a demand made to the very last upon the faith of the servants. Their faith was exercised in filling the vessels with water without any purpose, so far as they could see. It was still further exercised by their being called upon to draw out the water, without any use, so

far as they could know. And the faith thus severely tried, overcoming all obstacles of belief in their own souls, overcame all obstacles in nature. And in the miracle of the fruit of the vine, the promise was literally fulfilled in their experience: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

And the feature in all the miracles that I have adduced—that only what was used was changed or multiplied—teaches us the Divine lesson that the gifts of Heaven, however precious in themselves, are blessed to us only when we rightly use them. The corn will only yield a harvest to us when we till the ground and sow it; and all faculty is like seed which, if planted in good and honest work, will grow and expand and bless thousands with its shadow and fruit. The water that is drawn out by prompt obedience and simple trust in God is changed into wine. The shepherd's rod in the hand of Moses, dry and lifeless, stiff and unbending, cast upon the ground at the command of God, becomes a serpent, endowed with higher life, instinct with vigour, bending in

all directions. And so used in the service of God. acting in faith and obedience to His will, our talent, however humble, our opportunity, however commonplace and ordinary, will be changed into something more powerful, more precious, higher in the scale of life and worth. It will become vital and flexible, and accomplish purposes which in its original state we could never have dreamt of. What astonishing things have weak and obscure men, men of one talent only, done in the world, by doing thoroughly the one thing that they could do; by laying out their time and faculty to the best advantage; by seizing the opportunity they had, instead of waiting for a great one; and doing what lay nearest to their hand, instead of longing for some mighty thing to do or secret thing to know. And what wonderful things in the Christian field have those who were despised by their fellow-creatures done, merely by doing what their hands found to do in the service of God with all their might. We are the servants of Him who changed the rod which Moses threw upon the ground into a serpent, and the water which the servants of Cana drew into

wine; and we are called upon to use the things that are in our hands, not as things merely to be received and enjoyed, but as instruments which God has given to be ennobled in His service. Our work, among the common trivialities and household duties of life, may seem to ourselves and others no more than the mere emptying of water from vessel to vessel, a profitless task-work, like that of the fabled Danaids; but if we do it faithfully, not as unto men, but as unto the Lord, we know that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord. The contrast between the results we shall achieve and the apparent inadequacy of the means, will show of a truth that the Lord is working with us, and confirming the word with signs following.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET NATURE OF OUR LORD'S WORK.

"When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which drew the water knew)."—JOHN II. 9.

WE should have expected that Jesus in His first miracle would create something altogether new. Human beings are always craving for that which is wonderful and superhuman; and they think that when God appears among them, it must be in modes altogether different from those to which they are accustomed—that He will bring with Him directly a sign from heaven. True, God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways His ways; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts. But this truth obviously refers not to the method,

but to the manner and the degree of His operations —to the largeness and generosity of His plans, as compared with the narrowness and selfishness of ours. We are made in the image of God, and there must therefore be a consonance between our modes of working and those of God ; else, what becomes of the argument from design in nature, or of God's appeals to us as reasonable creatures in grace, "Come and let us reason together." And hence when the Son of God came to declare His great message to the world, He did not bring down with Him a mysterious revelation from heaven. He did not begin far away from us, with something marvellously deep and high, as though He wanted to baffle us and excite our wonder, but simply directed our attention to the common things about our path and in our homes—to the fowls of the air and the flowers of the field, and the daily bread of our households.

And so likewise when He began that wonderful miracle-working of His, which was designed to make all things new, to be a prophecy and a specimen of the new genesis under which there shall be no more want, or

sorrow, or death, because there shall be no more sin—He did not originate new forms and forces of matter; but simply removed the limitations and disabilities of the things already existing, and by the display of heavenly power imparted a special glory to common things. He came not as a Creator but as a Redeemer. The first creation was perfect. He saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good. It could not be improved in the way of addition. It needed only to be freed from the encumbering weight which human sin had laid upon it—so that its own intrinsic beauty and order might be plainly manifested. The work of Jesus, therefore, in the new creation, was not an addition to nature, or an arbitrary contravention of nature, but consisted in the removal of hindrances to its proper harmonious activity, bringing it back to the primitive perfection and blessedness. Not one of His miracles involved an act of creative power. Not one of them added a single particle or a single ounce to the matter and the weight of the globe. The materials which He made use of were already at hand, either in the earth, the air, or the water,

and He wrought among them—as we ourselves work in nature—as the chemist works in his laboratory, only in a higher way, as became His more exalted dignity, without disturbing the order of nature. At Cana He did not introduce some heavenly beverage unknown to men, some drink of the angels—but simply produced the common wine of the country—the very same kind of wine which the guests had previously been drinking at the marriage feast, only of better quality. And this wine was not formed in the empty jars; they were filled with water; and this water was changed into wine by the use of forces of which there had been no previous knowledge, but which did not therefore imply the violation of any force or law of the universe, or the creation of a single substance which was not already in existence.

But having thus shown that the wine of Cana was not a new creation—but was identical with the common wine of the people—the further question remains, What kind of wine was it? The miracle took place a few days before the Passover, as St. John tells us; and this festival

usually fell on the 30th of March. The wine that was drunk at the feast must, therefore, as I have said, have been kept for six or seven months from the previous vintage. It must, in consequence, have undergone the process of fermentation, for, without this, no organic juice could have been preserved for such a length of time. Fermentation is a natural process, which takes place in all watery solutions of vegetable substances containing saccharine matters; and depends entirely upon the growth of a microscopic fungus called the yeast-plant, which develops with extreme rapidity into myriads of minute cells or vesicles, and while doing so resolves the sugar in solution into alcohol and carbonic acid gas. The spores, or seeds, of this fungus exist in enormous quantities everywhere; and no vegetable juice can be exposed to the air for however short a time without receiving some of them; and if the temperature and other conditions be suitable, they begin at once to grow and multiply, thereby producing fermentation and liberating alcohol. Even in ripe grapes, while they are hanging on the vine,

this yeast-fungus is often developed, causing vinous fermentation. It is impossible, therefore, to produce an infusion of grapes from which these ubiquitous germs are absent—unless the juice is boiled, and the vessel hermetically sealed; and even then, so tenacious are they of life, we cannot be sure that we have got rid of them, as Pasteur's recent researches abundantly testify. And wherever these germs are present, the process of fermentation begins, and is carried on with greater or less rapidity according to the temperature. In a warm climate it goes on with extraordinary vigour. There is no such thing, therefore, as unfermented wine. The juice of the grape when immediately squeezed out may be so called; but if it is kept for a few days under ordinary conditions it inevitably undergoes the vinous fermentation. The common Hebrew terms employed to designate different kinds of wine indicate that they possess intoxicating qualities. *Tirosh*, the word for new wine, is derived from a root which signifies to take possession of—to go to the head—a meaning which obviously implies its power of inebriation. Specimens of the wine

made in the Holy Land have frequently been analyzed by experts; but not one has been found which did not contain from ten to nearly twenty per cent. of alcohol, and these wines are identical with those used in ancient times, and are made according to the old methods, from the pure juice of the grape. All these considerations prove beyond doubt that the wine of the feast was fermented wine, which would intoxicate if drunk to excess. And the wine which our Lord produced was of the same kind, only of superior quality. It was "good wine," as the governor of the feast testified when he tasted it; not a mere vegetable infusion, but possessing all the properties of a well-made and well-preserved wine. I have no special theory to support, being actuated only by a sincere desire to ascertain the truth in the matter; and therefore a candid and unbiassed consideration of all the facts involved shuts me to this conclusion.

And I see no reason why it should be unwelcome to any one. I cannot imagine why any one should make the production by our Saviour of a beverage which, if abused, would lead to

intoxication, a stumbling-block which must be removed out of the way at all hazards and by means the most unwarranted. Is it not in strict harmony with what we see throughout creation? God might have made a world free from all danger and temptation, without poisons, narcotics, and intoxicants—where nothing would be injurious to man. But in such a case the whole significance of our earthly life would be changed. There would be no exercise of human freedom, no opportunity of choice between good and evil, of exercising caution, prudence, self-restraint. There would be no testing of man's moral nature, and therefore no cultivation of his highest characteristic. He would be treated simply as a child, and his actions would have no moral value; virtue would be compulsory and therefore no virtue. But He who planted the tree of knowledge of good and evil even amid the unsullied beauties of Eden, has surrounded us in nature and in our daily life with things, which, if unwisely used, will seriously injure us physically and morally, in order to test our character, to educate our self-determining power; until ultimately our choice of what is good, in spite of

solicitations to what is harmful, will become easy and even unconscious. Those who object to our Saviour's production of a substance which, if improperly used, would lead to serious physical and moral consequences, must go further, and object to the presence of all other things in the world which may be abused, and thus produce evil. Nay, the same objection would need to be applied to the Gospel itself—for its doctrines too may be perverted to lasciviousness—and the grace of God may be made the minister of sin. Such persons forget that it is not the existence of fermented wine in the world that is the objection; but the abuse of it by men. There is no passage in the Bible that condemns such wine itself or the manufacture of it; its condemnation is directed rather against excess and intoxication than against the substance which is the occasion of the excess. Were the substance itself disapproved of, it would not, under the Mosaic law, have formed the usual drink-offering that accompanied the daily sacrifice and the presentation of the first-fruits. Tithe would not have been enjoined to be paid of it, and consumed before the Lord in the temple;

and a promise of plenty would not have been attached to the faithful payment of the priestly dues in this as in other articles. We should not certainly in such a case, have been invited to buy the blessings of grace under the emblems of wine and milk, without money and without price.

Our modern drunkenness has invested everything connected with wine with such terrible associations, that it may well be to many an object of loathing, and they may wish it were altogether obliterated off the face of the earth. But it was not so in earlier days and in eastern countries. Wine, as the late Dean Stanley has clearly shown, was the symbol of joy as well as of life among the ancients, by whom it was very rarely abused. A colossal golden vine was carved as an architectural ornament over the portico of the Jewish temple. In the Jewish church there was no festival so gay and free as the Feast of Tabernacles, when the people gathered the fruit of the vineyard and enjoyed themselves in their green bowers. Our Lord's deepest and most suggestive parable was based upon it; and

nothing is more striking than the frequency with which the figure of the vine occurs in the paintings on the walls of the Roman Catacombs, expressing the joyous and festive character of the primitive Christian faith. If the object were bad in itself it would not have occupied so prominent and important a place in the social customs and religious observances of the holiest people. Are we not in danger, when we thus denounce the substance itself, of forgetting that the evil of the world is not in things but in souls? The evil associated with wine is not inherent in it, but has been put into it by man's misconduct. From our abuse of it has gone forth the pollution that has given to it an outward likeness to sin. It is fraught with suggestions of temptation to us, but it was originally meant to be suggestive only of innocent cheerfulness and festive joy. Those who are tempted by it ought indeed to avoid it entirely; and Christians, on the ground of expediency, and in obedience to the higher law of Christian charity, which has Christ for its model and inspiration, may do well, in this country, where it is the besetting sin, to abstain from

its use, in order to help the weak to become strong, and the slave to become free. And on this ground of expediency the question should be always allowed to rest. Our modern drunkenness is a problem too complicated to be solved by any mere proscriptions and negations. There are many perplexing causes lying at the root of it, which require much patience and wisdom to find out, and much self-denial and practical benevolence to cure.

How the transformation of the water into wine was effected it is useless to inquire. We may investigate the outside of the mystery, but the heart of it is a sacred shrine into which no human foot can penetrate, which is possessed alone by the awful glory of God. It is customary to regard the miracle of Cana as an extraordinary acceleration of the natural and human forces which bring about the production and preparation of wine in ordinary circumstances—as doing instantaneously what it takes long months to accomplish in the vineyard and in the manufactory. The natural vine changes the dew and the rain of heaven into the juice of the grape;

and man makes use of another natural process, by which living plants convert by their growth, and the fermentation which consequently ensues, the juice thus formed into wine. But this analogy, though it shows to us that the miracle is in harmony with the ordinary operations of God's providence, being distinguished mainly by the rapidity with which the result is achieved, does not enable us to understand how it is actually wrought. Indeed, the common natural work in the vineyard is, in its own way, quite as mysterious and incomprehensible as the miracle at the marriage-feast. Who shall explain the function which the green leaf of the vine or of any other plant performs? That function is absolutely unique; it takes place nowhere else on the face of the earth. It is the most important in all nature. Every other object destroys organic matter; the green leaf alone creates it. The action of the green leaf in organising dead matter in the air and in the soil is the starting-point of all life. It alone keeps up the supply of living matter, which the life of the world uses and destroys. It combines the impalpable elements

in a form suitable to the nourishment of plants and animals; while these plants and animals are continually resolving this prepared material into its original inorganic constituents. Without the agency of the green leaf, therefore, the world would be a lifeless desert.

But how the green leaf thus mediates between the dead earth and the various forms of life, how it imparts a new character and new properties to inorganic forces, we cannot tell. It is all a profound mystery, how the green leaf of the vine prepares the sap, which builds up the substance of the plant, out of inorganic substances in the earth and air, of which water is the chief, by a set of elaborate combinations of the forces of the universe. And the process of assimilation, by which this sap is still further transmuted into the nobler juices which fill the grapes, has as yet baffled the researches of the chemist and the physiologist. There is an abundance of theories and hypotheses, but no sure satisfactory explanation. And if we cannot thus comprehend the natural process, which is so familiar to our observation that we have become utterly insensible to its intrinsic

wonderfulness, how shall we attempt to comprehend the miraculous process, which took place once, and once only, in the history of the world? It is surely not more mysterious to change water into wine, by the agency of the Son of God, than it is to change dead matter into living, by the agency of the green leaf. It would be a blind unbelief indeed, that would deny to the Creator of all things, the exercise of a power which He has delegated to the humblest of His creatures. Of one thing only we may be sure, that the miracle did not violate or suspend any force or law of the universe; and ignorant as we are of the way in which God works in the natural world, we have no reason to suppose that His working in the supernatural, must differ from that of His ordinary providence in any essential point.

In the preparation of the juice of the grape from the rain and the dew of heaven, the agency of the vital force of the plant is necessary. The life of the vine, in the unnoticed miracle of every-day nature, must impart to the air and the light and the water the new properties which they possess, when raised into the substance of the grape.

And so in the performance of the miracle of Cana we have the agency of Life—the highest of all life. As Crashaw strikingly says, "The conscious water saw its God and blushed." We see here the direct and immediate interposition of Him who is the True Vine. He dispenses with the agency of the natural vine, because He himself is in reality all that it represents; in its ripest and completest development, what the natural vine is only partially and imperfectly. He is the *pleroma*, or the fullness of the vine, and fulfils whatever its name in its highest, widest, deepest sense signifies. The natural vine takes several months to convert the water of the earth and air into wine in its grapes. Jesus is the True Vine, because He does it instantaneously. The natural vine works by roundabout complicated processes. Jesus is the True Vine, because by the simple exercise of His will, overleaping all the intervening steps of the tardier process, He accomplished the result at once.

But more than this is implied in the fact that He is the True Vine; for the word *true* means not only that He is the ideal of which the natural vine is only a subordinate realization, but also

that He is the *unconcealed vine*. *Alethinos*, the Greek word, comes from *lanthano*, to be hid, and *a*, not. The natural vine is the clothing of second causes which hides the Almighty Arm—the shadow cast by the reality which conceals it from view. Familiarity has so dimmed our eyes that we see nothing in the growth of the vine but a common phenomenon of nature. We are conscious only of its ordinary appearance and common use. It has no higher significance to us. But He who dwelt in this bush came out from behind the shadow that hid Him, and we hear His articulate explanation, in the parable, of what the natural vine really is—"I am the true vine." And we see in the miracle the laying bare of His Almighty Arm; so that we may know that it is He Who gives the sap to the vine, makes it what it is, and do what it does, by the ordinary processes of nature. He gives us the most convincing proof that He truly is what the vine appears to be, by showing to us the naked power itself in operation, producing the result without the instrumentality of the natural object. He thus, by His rare and extraordinary act, opens our eyes to behold the wonderful things

that may be always seen in every vineyard, corn-field, or forest; and teaches us to see in the commonest natural phenomena the evidences of His working.

One of the most remarkable things about the miracle was the quiet, unostentatious way in which it was performed. Jesus did not invoke the name of His Father; He did not even speak, as on many other occasions. In silence He put forth His Divine power, and the water became wine. There was no pomp of circumstance. The attention of the guests was not arrested. There was no wondering pause in the festivities. The merriment went on as if nothing unusual was occurring. There was no sense of a crisis. Unobtrusively the miraculous wine took its place among the ordinary refreshments on the table, and could not be distinguished from them. It was not kept sacred like the shewbread, or the pot of manna, or regarded as a curiosity to be treasured by itself. On the contrary, it was given to be drained from ordinary cups, and to mingle with the ordinary food at the feast. The Evangelist is careful to inform us that not even the ruler of the feast, the first

taster of the wine, himself knew whence the wine came, but supposed naturally that it formed part of the choice stores of the bridegroom, which he had reserved for a later stage of the festivities. Only the servants knew what had happened; and if they were astonished, as they must have been, they did not express their wonder by any outward signs sufficient to draw upon them the gaze of those at the table, and the Evangelist does not stop to notice it. There is a strange calmness and secrecy about the whole incident. We miss in it what we have been taught to look for in a miracle—the outward show, the surprise, the awe, the consciousness of the nearness of a heavenly power, the interruption to the common business of life. We hear it said that miracles were wrought as evidential signs of the kingdom of heaven; to produce conviction in men's minds that Jesus was indeed what He claimed to be. And yet, here, most of those who were present were utterly ignorant that a miracle had been wrought at all; and so far as they were concerned it was thrown away. May we not reason therefore, that the design of the miracle

was not evidential, in the sense of exciting the surprise of the spectators? The attitude in which we place Jesus, as doing mighty works for the purpose of proving His Divine authority as a miracle-worker, making supernatural claims, and desiring to submit them to the investigation of the incredulous, is one which He Himself never assumed; and which is clearly contradicted by the facts, that when the people were sceptical, Jesus could do no mighty works because of their unbelief, by the obscurity in which most of these mighty works were done, and by the secrecy which He strictly enjoined upon all who got the benefit of them.

And in this respect the first miracle gives the key to the character of the whole series. What is said of it—that the ruler of the feast who tasted the water that was made wine knew not whence it was, but took it for ordinary wine—may be said of Christ's whole life and work on earth; which purified and ennobled the elements of the world and of humanity, but in a manner so natural, so gradual, so quiet, that it did not surprise or startle the spectators. He revealed Himself to men in His human form—not in a sudden

blaze of Divine glory, but amid the common surroundings of ordinary life. At His birth there were no signs given of His greatness, except those of a supernatural kind; and these only to a few simple shepherds, and strangers from a distant land. The name which He bore was a common one in Israel, and was pronounced without any feeling of sacredness. For thirty years He was known only as the son of Joseph the carpenter. And at the commencement of His ministry, He did not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets. He did not lead men away into the wilderness, like John the Baptist, to feed on locusts and wild honey, and thus to make Himself a wonder throughout the land; but He came to men and abode with them, sharing with them all the common wants and experiences of life. And His most wonderful works were done, not in conspicuous places for ostentation, but in quiet spots, in far-away villages, for the benefit of the poorest and humblest; and so far from being startling and overpowering deviations from the ordinary operations of nature and providence, they uniformly took their departure from the

common and the ordinary, so that it is difficult to tell where the line of demarcation between the natural and the supernatural occurs. There was no show about His life; even in the midst of its miracles it was marked by nothing that was specially exciting. It was eminently natural and quiet. It was this absence of all appeal to the senses that offended the prejudices of the Jews and led to His rejection. They would not believe that One whose parents and friends and whole manner of life were so well known to them, who had nothing apparently of what they thought was Divine about Him, who sought to establish His rule over men, not by dazzling conquest, but by love and sorrow and self-sacrifice, could be their Messiah.

And we all know how the kingdom which He thus brought into the world without observation, spread without noise, unaccompanied by worldly pomp or greatness. Not by ostentatious miraculous acts, but by faith and love and quiet human devotion, it found its silent way into all parts of the world, producing there a new influx of life and beauty; as an arctic summer steals into

the very bosom of winter, and ere the ice and snow have passed away, bright verdure creeps over the earth, and hosts of brilliant flowers laugh in the sunshine as if by magic. And to every believing, expectant soul it comes in the same way still. The fruits and effects of the new heavenly life which it produces are seen of men, but the life itself is hid with Christ in God. And the answers which are given to believing prayer are not startling interpositions of the Divine arm. God does not send them visibly from heaven, like the sheet let down to Peter at Joppa, but by the ordinary means and ways of His providence, so hidden among the common events of life that it requires no small faith and patience to recognise them. The same Divine law of secrecy applies to the institutions of God's kingdom. We know not how the Bible grew to completeness as the inspired Word of God; how the canon of either the Old or the New Testament was formed under the guidance of Divine providence. We cannot tell how the Lord's Day came to supersede the Jewish Sabbath, and to establish itself as an essential part of the Gospel dispensa-

tion ; for there is no express formal enactment of it in the New Testament. So too with the sacraments of the Church—the signs and seals of God's kingdom: they all came not with observation. We cannot separate between the Jewish Passover and the Christian Communion, or indicate when the one rite merged into the other, in our Lord's Supper in the upper chamber at Jerusalem. The sacrament of infant baptism is not definitely mentioned and formally prescribed in the New Testament—appearing only in a few historic glimpses and occasional modes of speech that are subtle implications of the fact ; although the rite very early took its place as an accepted element of the Christian organization. All these institutions of God's house are like the seed cast into the ground, which germinates and grows up in a mysterious manner—man knoweth not how.

The very essence of God's kingdom is secrecy. It is the kingdom of Him whose glory it is to conceal a matter. The dawning of the day cometh not with observation. Who can divine the precise moment when the day and the night part, and the little line of grey light appears on the eastern

horizon, which is the boundary between the world of life and the world of death, fraught with such profound significance, and destined slowly to broaden and brighten until it orbs itself at last in the risen sun? Who can tell when the languid blue of the afternoon sky deepens into the dim and unfathomable twilight, and the sunset gold is quenched in the light of the rising stars? Who has marked the footsteps of spring in the subdued and pensive February woodland, though all are conscious of the stimulus of growth, the quickened pulse, the brooding, solemn feeling of a creative influence, an energy of love, over all the waiting earth? The dawning of the year cometh not with observation. Without haste, without noise, without miracle, save that greatest of all—the miracle of perpetual order and undeviating law,—with a secret and subtle gradation of growth which no human eye can catch, the copse grows dense with purple buds, the willow plumes its leafless wands with silk, the fields become transfigured with daisies, and the banks are brightened with the mimic sunshine of myriads of primroses, as the beauty of nature passes on to its fullest

development. We need to be reminded of truths like these ; for, like the Jews of old, we too crave for signs and wonders. We do not see God in His ordinary works, or own Him in His ordinary providence. If things come about by natural means, we cease to believe them Divine. If we can account scientifically for any fact, then the mystery has gone out of it, and it has nothing of God to tell us. Strange perversity and ignorance of mind that sees God only in the loud and startling and wonderful, and refuses to recognise Him in the common and quiet and orderly arrangements of nature and providence! This is the spirit of the savage, who hears God in the thunder and sees Him in the lightning and the storm and the volcano, and finds Him not in the beaten paths of men, in the dew and the sunshine and the opening flowers.

I know nothing more comforting, among all the doubts and anxieties caused by the recent discoveries and speculations of science, than the suggestions which arise from the fact, that our Lord's first miracle was wrought in such a quiet, unobtrusive, natural way that it seemed

to most of those present an ordinary occurrence. What though science is showing to us more and more clearly that God is working in nature by uniformitarian methods, and not by cataclysms and abrupt transitions? What though it should reduce the field of the miraculous, and bring much of what we thought were the wonders of God's special and supernatural dispensations within the cycle of natural law? Such a conclusion, could it be satisfactorily established, ought not to shake the faith of any one in God's direct and immediate administration, or in any of the great verities of His revealed truth. Such a natural, quiet, orderly, uniform method of procedure would be in entire harmony with what Jesus Himself has revealed of the character of the kingdom of God in nature and in grace. We should in such a case cease to look here or there for signs and wonders, for miracles and revolutions, and realize more vividly even than we do now, with adoring awe, that "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation."

"(*But the servants which drew the water knew.*)" The very typography of this sentence is sugges-

tive. It is contained in a parenthesis. It expresses an inner truth—conveys a hidden wisdom. It is a kernel in a shell which must first be cracked, a precious ointment in an alabaster box, which must first be broken. Walls of difficulty must be overleaped ere one can get into the green pastures and fruitful fields which they inclose. Brackets of sense hide, as it were, the supernatural revelation from those whose eyes are hidden so that they cannot see. Without is the general company, the guests at the table partaking of the feast, ignorant that anything unusual is occurring in the midst of them. Within are the chosen few whose eyes are opened to see the Almighty arm laid bare, and put forth from behind the veil of ordinary providence. Like the elders of Israel the servants saw God, and did eat and drink. What was hidden from the guests, even from the ruler of the feast, was revealed to the servants. And this, because of their faith, because of the important and all-essential work which their faith led them to perform. The guests who took no part in the work of preparation for the miracle—who did not contribute their own share of faith

and labour, were not aware that the heavens had been opened, and the ladder of communication between heaven and earth set up in the midst of them. Their hands were idle, and therefore their eyes were veiled. Only the servants knew, and they knew because they had helped Christ to perform the miracle by drawing the water, by doing what they had to do. The revelation came to them through their work, and was the reward of it. The secret of the Lord was with them because they had done the will of God. They co-operated with Him in the miracle, and therefore they were able to enter to some extent into the mystery of His processes, and comprehend in some measure the wonder of His methods.

And is not this true of all work which is a revelation? It is not in idle speculation, in mere theorising and musing, in standing looking on with folded hands, that we understand the plans and purposes of God, but when we enter into the field and work along with Him. God reveals Himself to us in and through our work. It is in doing the will of God that we know the doctrine that it is of God. Our action helps us to clearer and

fuller discoveries of His nature and methods than all our speculations and reveries. Thought raises clouds and vapours over the mind, and creates a mood to which miracles seem impossible; action clears away the mists and doubts and makes all things possible. The difficulties which the idle mood suggests, vanish when confronted by resolute action. And just as in the case of our bodily senses, the hand aids and exalts the powers of all the other senses, so does the doing of God's will enable us to see and hear with greater profit and insight. Doing God's will puts a spiritual telescope into our hand, whereby we can see the things that are unseen and eternal, which the mere eye of speculation could never see; or a spiritual microscope, which enables us to see wonderful things in God's law, which the mere eye of curiosity could never discern. The man who preaches the Gospel to others knows through that preaching more of its mystery and power. The teacher who instructs others becomes wiser himself by so doing. Engaging in the work of converting souls, we can sympathize with the Divine Son, who left the Father's house and

came into our sinful world to seek and to save that which was lost. We share His sorrow and we enter into His joy. We can hardly indeed be said to have a belief in any of the Divine realities — in God Himself — till we have begun to live for them. And therefore the fact that only the servants who drew the water knew that a wonderful miracle had been wrought, is characteristic of the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ, which can only be fully known to those who practically obey it. The revelation given through work in the first miracle, is typical of all revelations, which are given only to the servants of the Lord who do His pleasure. Our Lord's reply in His last discourse, to the words of Judas, "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make our abode with him,"—a reply in which He shows that the power of receiving a Divine revelation depends upon active obedience, which rests upon personal love—is thus only a fuller unfolding and a wider application of what is implied

in the account of the first miracle, when it is said that the ruler who tasted the water that was made wine knew not whence it was, but the servants which drew the water knew.

The ignorance of the ruler of the feast is also typical in another sense. How often do we drink of God's natural wine without knowing whence it is, without thinking that the Giver is beside us. Miracles as wonderful as that of Cana are wrought for us every day; but we are insensible to the wonder that is in them; they are to us mere ordinary commonplace occurrences. We have been accustomed to them. Familiarity has blinded our eyes; and we are like the cattle who eat in the pasture without knowing the glory that is in the grass, and the splendour that is in the flower, and drink of the stream without lifting our eyes to the eternal hills from whence it flows.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEST KEPT TO THE LAST.

"The governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now."—JOHN II. 9, 10.

IN primitive times the person at whose charge an entertainment was given, was chief manager of it. He distributed to every guest his portion. Those to whom particular respect was due were helped to the best parts, and to a larger share than the rest of the guests; as the mess of Benjamin, the beloved brother of Joseph, was five times as large as that of the other brethren. In after times this custom was laid aside as illiberal and invidious, and the guests were allowed to help themselves as they pleased. But at these entertainments of a later age,

especially at those provided at the common expense, a master or governor was elected by lot or by the suffrages of the guests, whose business it was to determine the laws of good-fellowship, and to see that every man was duly supplied with the food and wine that he wished. The guests were obliged to be in all things conformable to the commands of this important functionary. At the marriage of Cana, we find that this custom which was universal among the Greeks and Romans, was observed. The governor of the feast was called an *architriclinos*, meaning literally one who presided over an entertainment, where there were three sets of cushions arranged for the guests to recline upon at table. He was not a servant who had charge of the dishes and provisions, and was appointed to serve the guests, but a friend of the bridegroom, and was appointed by him as the chairman of the banquet, to insure that all things should be done properly and in order. This is clearly proved by the authority which he is seen to possess, the freedom of his conduct at the feast, and the terms of equality and intimacy upon which he stood to the bride-

groom. Lightfoot supposes that he was a kind of chaplain, whose duty it was to pronounce the blessings, appointed by the law, upon the wine that was consumed during the seven days of the marriage-feast. At the opening of the marriage ceremony among the Jews, the priest took a glass of wine in his hand, and said, "Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, the Creator of the fruit of the vine." He repeated this prayer at the table before the wine was dispensed to the guests. But whatever might have been the precise nature of his duties—that the position of the ruler of the feast was a most important one, is indicated by the fact, that the name of his office was given to the Christian convent, erected in Cana by the Empress Helena, which was known far on in the middle ages as the "Holy Architriclinos."

Our Lord, with the true courtesy which led Him always to accommodate Himself to the feelings of others, without descending from His own dignity, or sacrificing His own principles, recognised the position and authority of the ruler of the feast. He treated him with all due defer-

ence. To him therefore, as the president of the banquet, whose duty it was to taste and distribute the wine to the guests, our Lord commanded that which He had made to be brought. Ignorant of the origin of the miraculous wine, and surprised at the superior quality—the ruler of the feast summoned the bridegroom to his side, and in a gay bantering tone in harmony with the festive occasion, said, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now." There is no reason to conclude from this remark that the guests had been indulging to excess; that this marriage-feast was an orgy such as festivities were too apt to become. As already observed, we have a guarantee in the presence of our Lord that the mirth and its accompaniments would be kept in moderation; and we may be certain that He would not sanction an abuse of the common bounties of God's providence, much less supply the means for still further abuse. The phrase "well-drunk" to which objection of this kind is commonly taken, is a very harmless one. It does

not mean to become intoxicated, but to partake largely and heartily. And the allusion is simply to a fact of common experience, that the delicate perception of quality in a beverage is apt to be impaired by large, though not necessarily undue, indulgence in it. At first the palate distinguishes with the utmost nicety the quality of the wine; but afterwards as more of it is drunk, the keen edge of the taste is blunted, and it cannot distinguish between the different kinds, so that an inferior wine at this stage might be substituted for a superior one, without the guests being any the wiser. The extraordinary pitch of perfection to which the sense of taste may be educated, is shown by the experience of those who are employed, in docks and warehouses, to discriminate between samples of different kinds of wine and tea; but these men use the utmost caution in the exercise of their peculiar gift. They are careful only to employ a very small quantity of the article experimented upon; and they confine their trials within very narrow limits. Excess or familiarity destroys the sensitiveness of the nerves, and tends to deaden the impressions pro-

duced upon them. So alive are some musicians to this physiological fact, that they will not touch an instrument that is out of tune, lest their sense of harmony should be impaired. Advantage of this common experience has often been taken in matters of business by unscrupulous men. Many a seller of wine would not hesitate to replace an expensive article by a cheap and inferior one, when his customer had drunk sufficiently to confuse his powers of discrimination. Indeed the ruler of the feast speaks as if it were a matter of notoriety, a universal practice at entertainments, to produce the best wine first; in some instances no doubt from mean and sordid motives, but in others from a desire, commendable in itself, that the good things provided might be properly appreciated, and not thrown away upon men whose taste had been vitiated by indulgence.

But this economy of the world, reads to us, in the application made of it at the marriage feast, a most significant spiritual lesson. Referring to Christ, it acquired like the prophecy of Caiaphas, and the anointing of Mary of Bethany, a deeper and wider meaning than the

ruler himself was conscious of. For it is characteristic of everything said of and done to Jesus—that it partakes of His own grandeur, and gains somewhat of the power of His mysterious character and history. It is the arc or small part of the curve that implies the infinite circle. One great truth has been already illustrated. We have seen how in the Bible the poor, dead water of the law passed by His word into the richer, living element of grace. Another truth equally important remains to be shown—and the ruler of the feast gives utterance to it—that in human life, the world gives its best first, while Jesus gives His best last. By these two symbols of the water-pots and the proverb of the ruler of the feast, the one inarticulately acted, the other unconsciously spoken, we are assured that Jesus not only gives us a richer feast than we ourselves could have provided, but keeps that feast for us pure and sweet and satisfying to the very end. This interpretation is one that has been put upon the words of the ruler of the feast by almost every commentator, from the days of St. Augustine; and the very commonness of it

shows how natural it is—how instinctively the mind and heart apprehend it. Its familiarity should not lessen its impressiveness. It will bear continual repetition, for each new generation the old experiment is repeated, and the old result is illustrated with new force.

The gay world to the young presents the appearance of a feast, where everything is provided that can please the eye and satisfy the sense. The glamour of novelty is over everything; and the guest is eager to drain the tempting cup. There is bliss in the first draught; the heart is thrilled with new and nameless emotions; alluring visions flit before the fancy's eye; present joy and boundless possibilities of good to come create a scene of enchantment. But ere long the glow vanishes, like the bright hues of the rainbow, into the coldness and gloom of the cloud. Experience strips off the beautiful disguise and reveals the nakedness beneath. Enjoyment itself has brought satiety; the luxuries pall upon the taste; and long ere the cup is drained to its dregs, the soul turns from it with dislike. There is not a more miserable creature than the man to whom

the world has given all its blessings and has nothing more to promise. What must have been the moral condition of Tiberius Cæsar, the undisputed master of the world, when he could begin a letter to his senate from Capri, where he indulged in the most insane excesses, with these awful words, "May the gods and goddesses doom me to a worse perdition than that which I daily suffer, if I know what to write to you!" Picture the state of the nobleman, who after a long course of dissipation, in which he had drained the world's cup of enjoyment to the very dregs, said, looking down upon the Thames at Richmond from his windows, "O that weary river, it will keep flowing on and on, and I so tired of it all!" There are many in our large cities leading a gay and fashionable life, who have so worn out their capacity of enjoyment, so exhausted every source of pleasure, seen so complete an end of all perfection, that their life is a miserable vacuity. They have no interest in life. They are weary of everything, and most of all of themselves. The cup that was at first so sweet became common, and then

utterly tasteless and insipid. The wine which they drank at first with such eagerness and relish, which thrilled them with such delightful feelings and inspired them with such blissful dreams that earth seemed a paradise, became water, then vinegar, and finally wormwood and gall. In every poet's song, in every philosopher's argument, the vanity of the world's pleasure is the most interesting chapter, for it is that which finds a response in every human bosom. Every individual will testify that the novelty of this world's pleasures constitutes their greatest charm; that they please most at the first. Every repetition of them tends to diminish their sweetness and power—and at last, if indulged in to excess, they produce only satiety and disgust.

Take the case of the drunkard. Why does a man get intoxicated? Is it not because he is dissatisfied with the mean low life of worldliness and drudgery which he usually leads, and pants after a higher life and a freer atmosphere? It is only by drinking the poisonous cup, he imagines, that he can escape from the miseries of his position, from the cares and sorrows which

dwarf his nature to their own low level, and live for a brief interval in an ideal world. The longing for stimulants is indeed a perverted spiritual appetite—an unceasing longing of the soul for God—for higher and purer happiness than the hard round of daily life can give. Man believes the tempter's words, "Ye shall be as gods." And at first he does feel godlike in capacity and in happiness. He is raised above the world, and feels that all its woes and wants are beneath him. But this hour of elation passes away; reason and sensibility vanish; and the miserable victim awakens from the degraded sleep of drunkenness, with a grievous sense of bodily discomfort, and, worst of all, with a profound feeling of shame and self-contempt. Such are the effects which one drunken revel produces; but they are still more painfully seen in the case of the confirmed drunkard. It is long since he drank all the good wine which his lust could give him; and now he is drinking the bitter dregs of the wretched wine which biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder. There was a time when the tottering frame was instinct with health and

vigour, and the palsied hand had a grasp of iron, and the bloated and distorted face was full of comeliness and intelligence. There was a time when the fiery cup in which he now seeks to drown for a brief space his wretchedness—and which he abhors from his inmost soul, even while his unquenchable appetite compels him to drink it—inspired him with joy, cheered him with bright hopes, and imparted a wild beauty and syren sweetness to life. It was then the good wine; it is now that which is worse. There is nothing but misery and ruin of body and soul in the cup now.

Nor is it otherwise with the avaricious man! How precious was the first piece of money that came into his hands long ago as the reward of personal industry! How endless did its capabilities appear! Was there anything which that wonderful coin could not purchase! There was nothing selfish or covetous in the feeling of elation which its possession produced; on the contrary, it was a pure and natural instinct. It was a medal of merit, a solid equivalent for frugal hours and self-denying labours, a tangible and

enduring memorial of many happy days. The wine at that stage when he began to feel the pride of possession, and to realize that he too was an independent sharer in the world's wealth, was very pleasant. But as he drank deep of the golden cup the first fresh glow of happiness disappeared. Successful in his business—the increase of his wealth grew with such uniform steadiness that he came to regard it as a matter of course, and it awoke in his heart no thrill of satisfaction. His cares and anxieties grew with his fortune; his wants expanded with the means of gratifying them; and the greater his gains the less pleasure did they yield. He felt, in the very abundance of the world's good things, that they bore no more relation to the real wants of his nature than a bag of pearls to a man dying of thirst. What a wide difference between his feelings now, and the proud and pleasing sensations experienced long ago, when the first reward of his industry was placed in his hands! This is the inevitable consequence of the love of riches. It is first the good wine and then that which is worse.

A further confirmation of the words of the

governor of the feast may be seen in the case of the ambitious man. Fame and power and honour may be fascinating in the prospect, may be sweet even in possession for a short time; but they afford, according to the universal testimony of those who speak from experience, but a poor compensation for the days of toil and nights of care by which they are purchased. The heart is filled at first with exultation at the homage of the crowd. It is grand, a nation's love, a people's benison. But the power is soon felt to be a mockery, the praise becomes burdensome. Memory reverts with mournful regret to a time when one simple flower in childhood's hand was fairer than all the splendour, and gentle smiles and loving words could give a deeper and purer joy than all the triumph. The glorious pageant is but a blackened brand with all the fire outburned. The first draught of ambition's cup is indeed the sweetest; all that follows is often bitterness and loneliness. The fruit is fair to the eye, but in the mouth it crumbles into ashes. It lures but to disappoint; it tempts but to betray.

And there is surely no exception in the case

of him who is distinctively called a lover of pleasure. He listens to the alluring voice which says, "Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Life is made for enjoyment; youth is the season of pleasure. Why meet so early with the monkish law of repression and austerity, the passions and desires that were meant to be gratified? Let the spring-tide of youthful life overflow its banks, for too soon and too surely will the ice of age lock up the generous current. The pleasures of sense appealing with all their charms to a heart filled with the longings of youth, speak with a magician's power. But soon these pleasures fill the bones with pain and the heart with woe. A continual round of excitement produces its consequent reaction in low spirits and melancholy. The flagging senses are goaded into unnatural activity; strong excitements are needed to kindle that sensation of pleasure which once the simplest things could yield. The bodily frame is driven beyond endurance, and the penalty at length comes in a ruined constitution, an incurable disease. Who can help him who has wasted all his powers until he has

not a sense left to enjoy with; who has exhausted his nervous system and ossified his heart, so that he can never again have a pure and right feeling, by a long course of revelry or lust? Sin and sensuality have their martyrs as well as truth and righteousness; and many a feeble and emaciated form ripened long ere its time for the grave, proclaims in saddest tones that "the wages of sin is death." The good wine has first been deeply drunk and now the worse comes.

Such is the bright feast of the gay world which fascinates so many to their ruin. We have seen how in this life unsanctified pleasures leave grievous stains and painful stings behind; rich as is their foliage, and fair their blossom, the fruit they produce is a nauseous dead sea-apple. But it is only when we regard them in the light of eternity, weigh them against the things of heaven, that we come to know truly their utter vanity and worthlessness. David was sorely perplexed at the prosperity of the wicked; but when he went into the sanctuary, when he ascended the mount of vision, he saw from that elevated standing-point the end of their course, and immediately

his difficulties vanished. He knew then that the ungodly rich, who fared sumptuously every day, and had all that heart could wish of outward blessings, had their good things in this life, while their evil things awaited them after death; and he exclaims, "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As in a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when Thou awakest, Thou shalt despise their image." Well did Isaiah say, "And the harp and the viol, the tabret and the pipe and wine are in their feasts, but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself; and their glory, and their multitudes, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth shall descend into it." Let no young man sit down at this feast, with the idea which is so persistently taught to each new generation, that the knowledge of evil will prove an ultimate gain to him, that a course of sensual indulgence is an essential part of a young man's education, preparing him for after-life by making him wiser and stronger,

giving him a truer knowledge of the world, and a more real and practical sense even of the value of morality and religion. That is the old half-truth of the tempter. "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." No doubt those who have got all that their lust could give them, have a conviction deeper and more intense than could be gained in any other way, of the utter folly and misery of a course of pleasure. But what is the use of such wisdom, so dearly bought, seeing that it comes only when all action is over, and the evil has been done past remedy. The lesson has ruined the learner before it has been learned. The last state of that man is indeed worse than the first.

"Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse." In one respect only, the analogy between the conduct of the ruler of a feast and that of the world does not hold good. The one acts voluntarily; the other by stern necesssity, by an inevitable law. The entertainer of a feast may have an ample supply of the best wine in his cellar, while from motives of economy, or

prudence, he gives the worst wine to his guests when they have well drunk, knowing that in that state they are incapable of judging of the quality of the wine. But the world on the other hand is compelled by a stern necessity to give the worst wine in the end to those who have drunk deeply of its cup, for it has no other kind at its disposal. Its wine is always the same; and the bitterness of its taste and the inferiority of its quality entirely depend upon how deeply we drink of it.

Let us now turn to the other picture, to the conduct of our Lord as opposed to that of the world. He is represented as an entertainer, who sets before His guests His common or worst things at the beginning, and His best things at the close of the feast. We find a striking illustration of this truth in the life of our Lord Himself, who was made in all things like unto His brethren. He was emphatically the man of sorows—as if there were no other; and yet the legacy which He left to His disciples was His own joy—"that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." There was a joy set before Him, a joy in reserve as well as in experience, for

the sake of which He endured the cross, despising the shame. He drank the poorest wine first and then the best. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the cursed death of the cross; wherefore God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name. And as with the Master, so with the disciples; they drink of His cup and are baptized with His baptism. The law of His kingdom is first the cross, and then the crown; first suffering, and therefore glory. His blessings are not like random sunbursts through the clouds, or the irregular overflowings of an intermittent spring, but form parts of a gradually unfolding series. They are bestowed in proportion as our necessities arise, and our faculties expand. We are progressively prepared for them; step by step we are led on from one degree of holiness and happiness to another; and at every step so great is the bliss enjoyed, and so delightful are the prospects unfolded of the wonderful scheme of grace, that the believer is tempted to exclaim, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

The gospel is spread out before us like a rich feast, of which we are freely invited to partake; but there is an established order in which the provision must be used. We cannot anticipate or forestall what is suitable for each stage. Here and now we cannot get the best of what God has in store for us. The horizon of grace expands before us the nearer we approach it, disclosing new beauties; the cup of salvation widens and deepens the more we drink of it, and the sweeter the draught becomes. How wonderfully do the necessities and experiences of our own life bring out of the exhaustless fulness of God new and undreamt-of blessings, suitable to our case, causing us to exclaim, "Oh, how great is the goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee!" Even in dark days of privation and loss, we have the higher pleasures of self-denial, and the prouder joys of victory over temptation and evil, the pleasantness of pain incurred for duty, and the beauty of self-sacrifice when it springs from principle. We have pleasures which are independent of outward circumstances, which com-

pensate for the loss, and disqualify for the pursuit, of earthly pleasures, and which endure undiminished to the end; the more they are cultivated and enjoyed, the more they enlarge the capacity and the sense of enjoyment. This is good wine, but the best awaits us. Our Heavenly Father does much for us here; but He has placed us in a relation to Himself which implies and requires that He should do far more. He keeps back His richest gifts, for we have not powers capable of receiving them now; our nature is not purified enough, our capacities are not sufficiently enlarged, to take in the glory that shall yet be revealed in us.

On the lovely shores of the Lago di Garda in Northern Italy, I have read how the peasants make a precious white wine which they call *vino santo.* They leave the grapes in the vineyard long after the rest of the vintage has been gathered in, and converted into wine. And when at last they are sufficiently ripened to suit their purpose, the clusters are carefully cut off, each by itself, in the early morning, while the dew is still sparkling on the golden grape bubbles in

the fresh brilliant sunlight of October. Over each gathered cluster the priest makes the sign of the Cross, and invokes the blessing of Heaven. Brought into the winepress, the grapes are left there in the cool shade untouched until Christmas Day; and then, with many mystic ceremonies, the Holy Wine is prepared from them, which thus possesses many magical virtues, and is drunk in times of unusual solemnity, and administered in last illnesses as a viaticum. In like manner does Jesus prepare for us the *vino santo* of Heaven. Through all the fleeting seasons of life, which bring fruition and decay to all other things, the precious clusters that are to reward all our patience and labour, are silently and slowly growing, and developing more and more of their fulness and sweetness. They require the accumulated influences of all our life to mature them thoroughly. The sign of the Cross must be impressed upon each of them. Only through sorrow and death—through the fellowship of Christ's sufferings—can we store them up. And while we are enduring the trials of our earthly lot, He is busy garnering up

for us, within the veil, love's heavenly vintage, and looking forward with longing to the time when He will drink the *vino santo* with us in the kingdom of God. His joy and His glory will not be complete till all His guests will be gathered together to the marriage supper of the Lamb in the celestial banqueting-house. There will be then a festival of gladness, of which all earthly joys, however deep and pure, are but faintest images. All the water will be changed into wine, and every vessel will be filled to the brim. The table will never be withdrawn; the company will never separate; the banner of love that floats over them will never be furled; the pleasures will never fade or pall upon the taste. Then, while evey beaming chalice is brimming over with bliss, and Christ Himself in all the riches of His grace, and all the affluence of His glory, is satisfying the mighty longings of eternity—the meaning of the promise given to the disciples in the days of His flesh will be known in its fullest significance, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you;" and every joyful heart will acknowledge, with adoring gratitude to

Him who sits upon the throne, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

"Such is the world's gay garish feast,
In her first charming bowl
Infusing all that fires the breast,
And cheats the unstable soul.

"And still, as loud the revel swells,
The fever'd pulse beats higher,
Till the sear'd taste from foulest wells
Is fain to slake its fire.

"Unlike the feast of heavenly love,
Spread at the Saviour's word,
For souls that hear His call, and prove
Meet for His bridal board.

"Why should we fear youth's drought of joy
If pure would sparkle less?
Why should the cup the sooner cloy
Which God hath deigned to bless?

"Ever the richest tenderest glow
Sets round the autumnal sun—
But there sight fails: no heart may know
The bliss when life is done.

"Such is Thy banquet, dearest Lord;
Oh give us grace, to cast
Our lot with Thine, to trust Thy word
And keep our best till last."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEGINNING OF MIRACLES.

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and his disciples believed on him."—JOHN II. 11.

UPWARDS of forty apocryphal gospels have been written, to gratify the craving in the minds of men to learn something more than is revealed by the evangelists about the early life of our Lord. These gospels are distinguished by a childishness which deprives them of all dignity. The contrast between them and the inspired Records is most striking; and is one of the strongest arguments in favour of the authenticity of the latter. These forged documents abound in descriptions of miracles of the most capricious and fantastic character, said to have been wrought by our Lord, during His childhood and youth, in the mere wantonness of power—to benefit favourites, or as contrivances

for revenge. The true Gospels, with that soberness and calmness which are such marked characteristics of them, tell us explicitly that the marvel wrought at the marriage of Cana, at the commencement of Christ's public ministry, in the thirtieth year of His age, was the beginning of His miracles. It hardly, indeed, requires this express announcement to deprive of all historic credit the numerous miracles of Christ's infancy and youth which the apocryphal gospels contain. Their own silliness and want of purpose and consistency sufficiently indicate their spuriousness, and show to us what we might have expected if the Gospels had been mere myths instead of true history; what kind of supernatural works men in the exercise of their own imaginations would have attributed to the Son of God.

The evangelists do not represent Jesus as a youthful prodigy. There is no idealising of His early years, no attempt to show that He lived as a child a supernatural life full of wonders. On the contrary, the few glimpses given of that period show to us that His growth from infancy to manhood was eminently quiet,

natural, harmonious. His life slowly matured into fulness under the same influences of home, and nature, and society, which develop that of any ordinary child. Each stage was perfect in itself, and perfectly balanced with that which preceded and followed. He was perfect as a child, perfect as a boy, perfect as a youth, perfect as a man. There was no abnormal development at any period; nothing at any age out of keeping with what is characteristic of that age. He did not evince when a child a wisdom which properly belonged to later years; nor did He do things when a boy which only a full-grown man could have performed. He followed the Divine order of human growth, as a plant follows the Divine order of vegetable unfolding, first the blade, and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. And hence, the reserve of the Scripture narratives regarding the first twelve years of our Lord's life, and their total silence regarding the next eighteen—the very years which the apocryphal writings have crowded with the greatest number of mythical stories—commend themselves to us as in strict harmony with this

quiet, natural growth in wisdom as in stature, and in favour with God and man. We have an instinctive conviction that what the evangelists tell us is true, that our Lord's supernatural life began only when He entered upon His public ministry —in the full bloom of manhood, and the full maturity of all His powers; that previous to that crisis He did no miracle. The long years of quiet passiveness, waiting and ripening, were years of preparation for a short period of action the most intense and concentrated that the world has ever witnessed, whose every word and deed have moulded the history of the universe for ever.

All beginnings have a wonderful interest to us. There is a peculiar pleasure in tracing a broad deep river, that bears upon its bosom the commerce of a nation, to its source far up among the mountains, in a little well whose overflowing waters a child's hand could stop; or in going back to the origin of a mighty nation like the Roman, in the drifting ashore, at the foot of the Palatine Hill, of the ark that contained the infant founders. Institutions, social or benevolent, that have been established for ages, derive a fresh charm

from the consideration of their first feeble commencement, and the contrast between what they were then and what they are now. There is a mystery about a cloud coming all at once into the blue sky, a star appearing suddenly amid the twilight shades, a spring welling up in the midst of a sandy plain. It seems as if something new were being created before our eyes. A sense of awe comes over us, as if brought into contact with another world. I have had this curious feeling when coming unexpectedly upon the habitat of a very rare plant. It exists nowhere else; there is no trace or sign of its presence in all the neighbourhood; and coming suddenly upon it in the midst of the common, familiar vegetation of the region, I felt as if standing in the presence of a profound mystery, of something that God had created and preserved all these long ages, making the spot on which it grows holy ground, a place where a new and special revelation is given of Him who dwelt in the bush. Everything indeed, as it has been well said, is a miracle when first witnessed; our ignorance of its cause gives it a miraculous aspect

and fills us with wonder. Familiarity with it produces clearer knowledge, refers it to its proper place, and takes away the feeling of wonder and mystery connected with it, and hides its relation to the unseen and eternal. This peculiar charm of novelty belongs especially to the origin of sacred institutions—to the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the performance of the first miracle, the formation of the Christian Church, and the production of the New Testament writings. The thought that there was a time when these things had no existence, that for thirty years Jesus wrought no miracle, that the first believers in the gospel in Judea, Corinth, and Rome had no New Testament, gives a vividness to the feelings with which we regard them, brings back the freshness that has evaporated with long familiarity. The miracle of Cana comes into the midst of the previous natural life of Jesus like a star out of the blue profound, like a well out of the dry mountain side, like a rare, unknown flower appearing among the common indigenous plants of a spot. It brings us out of the narrow wall that hems us round, to the

verge of God's infinity, where we can look over into the fathomless gulf. It is the first act of the new creation, in which a new life-potency entered into what at the time existed, and called forth a new development. It gave to the stream of the world's course a new motion and a new direction, without which it would have become a stagnant bog—a dead sea. It is the base of that wonderful miracle structure of the gospel, of which the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the pinnacle.

The question occurs to us why should such an important miracle, the first which our Lord performed, have been noticed only in the Gospel of St. John. The other evangelists confine their attention principally to what happened in Galilee, while St. John mainly describes the ministry of our Lord in Judea. And yet the synoptical Gospels omit all reference to Cana of Galilee, while the Gospel of St. John gives it special prominence. The reason may be that the miracle of Cana was performed before St. Matthew, the first of the evangelists, was called to the discipleship. St. John was the only evangelist therefore who could have had personal knowledge of the

miracle; and writing a considerable time after the narratives of the others had been in possession of the Church, he would naturally desire to record what they had omitted, not merely for the purpose of filling up the blank spaces, but with the specific and distinctly announced design of showing the typical significance of Christ's mighty works. He was guided by the Spirit to select, among the many miracles which Jesus performed, those which were specially signs, and were connected with the profound spiritual discourses which were uttered immediately afterwards. More than the other evangelists, St. John seems to have regarded the miracles as "the tolling of the bell of the universe," that the attention of a busy, preoccupied, and unspiritual world might be directed to the sermon which Jesus immediately preached. The main idea of the miracles of St. John's Gospel, therefore, is to teach, not to prove; and the wonder in them is God's token and signal that He is about to speak. The external circumstances and physical features of the miracles chiefly seized hold of the minds of the other evangelists, and were described by them with dramatic force and vivid-

ness; and this objective mode of treatment is what we should have expected from disciples who had not been admitted into the inmost sanctuary of Christ's nature and teaching. Whereas to St. John, on the other hand, the scenic character of the miracles was lost sight of in the realisation of the profound doctrinal teaching, of which the outward circumstances and features of the incident were but the mere dramatic clothing; and this subjective treatment is what we should have anticipated from the disciple who leaned upon the bosom of Jesus, and who knew, as none of the others did, the thoughts of His infinite mind, and the beatings of His loving heart. It was necessary for St. John to regard the miracles in this light; for, as Maurice has well pointed out, Ephesus, where he wrote his Gospel, was the home of the enchanter and the magician; and though the Christians of that city, in the fervour of their first love, had burnt their magical books and renounced their occult practices, they still suffered from the effects of the old leaven. And we know from the Pauline Epistles that the early Christian Church was infected with the old heathen

arts and enchantments, and was prone, like Simon Magus, to value more the outward miraculous powers by which the presence of the Holy Spirit was manifested than the inward spiritual graces. As St. Paul, therefore, by precept strove to purify his converts from this thaumaturgic leaven, declaring that miraculous gifts were bestowed for spiritual use, and not for display in the eyes of the ignorant; so St. John, in the miracles which he recorded in his Gospel, drew attention not to what was extraordinary in them, but to what was significant, and showed that they were not strange and peculiar things to call forth men's wonder on their own account, not enchantments and prodigies, but signs of His presence in whom is all grace and truth.

The miracle of Cana is worthy of the place which it holds, because it indicates with the utmost clearness this principle of selection. As the first act of the new creation, it shows what the nature of that creation is to be. The first of a series always gives the key to the character of the whole. We find this in nature. The first introduced animals or plants of any class

have been combining types; that is, have united in themselves the characters of several families now distinct and widely separated. In the earliest fauna and flora one class stood for many. The earliest families combined the characters of several families or classes, and stood as their representatives, until these families or classes were separately introduced. The ferns foretell, in their structure and habit, the more fully developed flowers that are to make their appearance at a later stage. It is as if nature sketched out her work in general terms, and then elaborated each subordinate idea in separate families. We have the same law in the individual organism. The first leaf which the plant produces is the type upon which the whole plant is constructed; and foliage, flower, and fruit are but modifications of the primordial leaf. So in human history; in the earliest times human life was typical, and the earliest chapters of the Bible are full of such typical lives. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, are representative men, foreshowing, in their own personal character, conduct, and relations, "the essential

nature of large phases and long periods of human development." We read the wanderings of the Israelites in those of Abraham, and the discipline of the Jews in that of Jacob. The pilgrim Abraham was reproduced in Jacob; and the pilgrim character of the founder of the Jewish nation was reproduced in the nation itself; and the pilgrim nation is represented in the Church, which cherishes the blessed hope of resting when its wanderings are over in Abraham's bosom. There is a remarkable likeness between the history of each individual man and the history of the race out of which he springs. Each individual represents the experience of the race. Each leaf is a miniature of the whole tree, as the whole tree is but a development and modification of the single leaf. This law, that the first notes of the song suggest all that is necessary to make the harmony complete, which we see so widely illustrated in nature and human history, is clearly indicated in the first miracle of our Lord. That first miracle enters into all the other miracles which Jesus did. The turning of water into wine was a sign—

which the word used for miracle in the narrative means—of the character of all the works of goodness and wisdom under the Christian dispensation, by which humanity, suffering from the effects of sin, was to be raised into higher states of truth and righteousness. It combines in itself all the elements of Christ's miracles. It is a work of mercy; it is an emblem of a higher spiritual blessing; and it is a prophecy and a specimen of that new genesis, under which all things shall be restored to the primeval goodness and blessedness. Like an illuminated initial letter, which contains in itself an illustrated epitome of the contents of the whole chronicle, it appropriately begins the series of Christ's beneficent works by a beautiful picture of the nature and design of them all.

In the first place, it links the work of the second Adam with the work of the first. Adam was placed in Eden, in the midst of an abundance of the world's good things when they were truly good, and by his sin changed Paradise into a wilderness of want and woe. Christ came into this wilderness which man's sin

had made, and by His holy obedience changed it into a paradise. He recovered by His poverty what man had lost in his plenitude, triumphed in adversity as man had fallen in prosperity. And in this connection it is interesting to notice that our Lord proceeded directly from the wilderness of temptation to the marriage of Cana. These two things are co-related. It was because He suffered in the wilderness that He triumphed at the feast; because He endured the hunger and privation of the one that He procured the abundance of the other. He who refused to convert stones into bread in the wilderness to satisfy His own want, at the suggestion of Satan, was able, in obedience to His Father's will, to minister richly to the wants of the guests at Cana. Because He Himself would not eat the forbidden fruit, He was entitled to give to His disciples and followers to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

In the second place, the miracle of Cana shows to us the restoration of nature as well as of human nature. Through man's sin the curse of barrenness was pronounced upon the ground;

through the work of Christ that curse is removed, and the primeval blessing of fruitfulness is restored. The miracle of Cana is the beginning of that reign of abundance upon the earth which the prophets have foretold in such glowing imagery. Israel's hope was, that when the Messiah would come they should be gathered together in the garden of Eden, and should eat and drink and satiate themselves all the days of the world. Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, in describing the glories of the Messiah's kingdom, said that every vine should have ten thousand stems, and every stem ten thousand branches, and every branch ten thousand shoots, and every shoot ten thousand bunches of grapes, of which every branch would yield twenty-five firkins of wine. This is indeed an enthusiastic and extravagant image, but it suitably indicates the expectations of men's hearts connected with the effect of the work of Christ upon the world. The influence of the new creation will be extended, beyond the limits of man's moral nature, to the realm of external nature; and as that realm participated with man in the effects of

the fall, so shall it participate with him in the effects of redemption. The miracle of Cana is a pledge in hand of the accomplishment of that promise, the fulfilment of that expectation. It is the first step of a process which will eventually bring about the glorious results which it foretells, the firstfruits of a gracious power which does not stop with the miracle, but goes on to unfold itself more and more in the line of the miracle, and to make all things new. What Jesus wrought in the miracle intensively, He works out on the wider field of the world and in the course of the ages extensively; so that what took place in one small home, will yet take place in every field and vineyard and home all over the earth, and the beautiful words of Cowper will prove true over the whole of nature—

> "The reproach
> Of barrenness is past. The fruitful field
> Laughs with abundance; and the land, once bare,
> Or fertile only in its own disgrace,
> Exults to see its thistly curse repealed."

The miracle of Cana occupies its proper posi-

tion as the beginning of Christ's miracles, because it links the gospel dispensation, now about to be inaugurated, with all the dispensations that went before. Each of these dispensations was less complete than that which succeeded. Moses sweetened the waters of Marah, rectified the qualities which already existed in the well, precipitated its brackish elements to the bottom, a type of the ameliorating effect of the work of Moses upon the bitter spring of human sin. But Jesus changes the water thus sweetened into wine, imparts new qualities altogether to it. Moses reformed the old life of man; Jesus regenerated it. A dead tree wrought the miracle at Marah—emblem of a law which could make nothing perfect, and could only work an outward reformation; the living Saviour wrought the miracle of Cana. It was therefore meet that the miracle of Cana, taking its departure from the waterpots of the Levitical law, should be the beginning of an ascending series—ascending from ceremonial to spiritual, and ultimately from spiritual to celestial. Man had turned the original wine of God's grace into water; sin

had embittered it; but the love of Christ turned it into wine. In striking contrast, too, does it stand to the first miracle of Moses, which converted into blood the sacred waters of that river which is the vital artery of Egypt, symbol of the ministration of death which the law inaugurated. The changing of the water of purification into the wine of gladness was a meet inauguration of that gospel of grace, which came not merely that we might have life—a bare, meagre life, recovered from the punishment of the law and reduced to its simplest elements—but that we might have a more abundant life, a higher and richer life than even the keeping of the law would have bestowed upon us. The miracle of Cana is moreover an advance, not only upon the ceremonial ablutions of the Mosaic economy, but also upon the baptism of repentance of Christ's immediate forerunner. Jesus came to what was best and highest in the religious life of men, and provided for us within the forms and aspects of what had gone before, of the Mosaic dispensation and the ministry of John the Baptist, a new enrichment

and exaltation of our life. He passed from the baptism of the Jordan to the marriage feast of Cana, in token that what we draw from Him is not for ceremonial outward application, but for inward purity and gladness.

Further still, the miracle of Cana occupies its appropriate place, as the beginning of Christ's miracles, on account of the transcendent importance of the occasion with which it is associated. In this respect it is not only the first in the order of time, but also the first in the order of rank. As a human institution, marriage stands at the head of all others. It originated in Paradise; it survived the wreck of the fall. It is the origin and end of all living things. The life of the world, the existence of the Church, depend upon this primary fundamental ordinance. As the type of a heavenly mystery, it stands first in importance and significance. It represents, as it has been well said, the union of those attributes of love and power in God from which creation had its birth and has its continuance. It represents the union of the Divine influences and human experiences in the soul of man which

forms the kingdom of heaven within us. It represents the union of the Saviour and the Church of Christ and the individual believer which is the consummation of the work of redemption and the highest felicity of heaven. The emblem of bride and bridegroom was commonly used, throughout the prophetical books of the Old Testament, to describe the relation between God and His people ; it is, throughout the New Testament, applied to Christ and the Church. Under the image of a marriage feast, taking its cue from the occasion of the miracle of Cana, the accomplishment of Christ's work is most characteristically prefigured. No other part of God's order of the world has suffered so much from the abuse of man as marriage. The very Church itself has dishonoured, and religion denounced it. In proportion, then, to the dignity of the ordinance is the dignity of the miracle which indicates its order and rectifies its abuses, and by which Jesus claims it as His own, restored to the purity and blessedness of its first institution. We can thus see an adequate reason for this being the first miracle of Jesus; and

we can understand, besides, why the miracle should have assumed the particular form which it did, should have been wrought, not in special circumstances which would take it out of the range of ordinary cases, but in circumstances of universal application.

But finally, the miracle of Cana is not only first in order of time, but also first in order of rank, on account of the intrinsic difficulty connected with it. Of course, in one sense, there can be no gradation in the miracles of Jesus. Wrought by Him who had all power on earth and in heaven, they all stood on the same plane. But in another sense, we can discern degrees of difficulty in them; and they rise by successive steps to a climax. From the human point of view, the miracles which Christ wrought upon irrational nature are more remarkable than the miracles of healing, since in the latter the co-operation of the human powers of faith and imagination, the exercise of will and hope, is possible, which is entirely wanting in the passive, inert condition of the former. The line of demarcation between health and disease is a variable

and indefinite line; and no one can tell when or where the one condition merges into the other; therefore the cure of a disease may participate in this indefiniteness. But the boundaries of the physical world are more fixed and distinct. Water does not shade imperceptibly into wine; the inorganic kingdom into the organic. Nature, if let alone, may work a spontaneous cure; but nature alone will never change water into wine. By Strauss, therefore, the miracle of Cana was considered the very acme of the miraculous, since it involves a qualitative transmutation of an elementary substance. It is thus seen to occupy appropriately the post of honour as the initial work of Christ. And this position is still further suitable to it, because it connects the miracles of Christ, which have predominantly a relation to man's body and spirit, with the miracles of the Old Testament, which chiefly moved within the sphere of external nature, and were wrought to demonstrate the weakness of the nature-powers and the nature-worship of heathendom. In the miracle of Cana, the Divine power passed from the subordinate sphere of

nature, which is part of Christ's dominion, to the higher sphere of man's nature—from the amelioration of the wilderness of the world, to the improvement of the wilderness of man's heart and life.

The repetition of the name of the village at the close of the account of the miracle is a singular circumstance. This is the only example of it in St. John's Gospel in connection with a miracle. No doubt in other connections there are frequent repetitions. In passage after passage, "the eagle of God," as St. John was called, seems to wheel round and round certain significant thoughts and words. And as these repetitions were made for the sake of emphasis, so we may suppose that Cana of Galilee is twice mentioned to draw special attention to the place which was so highly honoured. Perhaps a sense of the contrast between the obscurity and humbleness of the stage upon which it was performed and the greatness of the miracle may have been in the consciousness of the evangelist. A native of Cana looked down upon the neighbouring town of Nazareth; and he might

have said the same thing regarding his own home, "Can any good thing come out of it?" No other event signalised the history of this little mountain village. Its name occurs nowhere else in the Bible. It is the radiance of the miracle alone that brings it out of the gloom of oblivion, and crowns it with an immortal halo. One other incident indeed is connected with the place which one is apt to forget. The second Galilean miracle was wrought there; not indeed as the scene of its effect, but as the place of its power. It was when Christ had returned to Cana from Jerusalem, where He had gone to keep the passover, that the nobleman of Capernaum besought Him to heal his son; and there the Divine power went forth—which, quicker than the lightning's flash, in distant Capernaum at once rebuked the fever and restored the child. Here was an extraordinary instance of "action at a distance;" a phenomenon which even in the physical world puzzles the scientific man. The same miraculous power, which changed water into wine on the former occasion, changed the ravages of disease into the harmonious operations of health

on this occasion; and Jesus proved Himself to be equally the Lord of nature and of man. Cana is thus identified with and consecrated by the supernatural. It was exalted to heaven by the mighty works done in it. Heaven and earth on that mountain elevation seemed to come nearer to each other, and to coalesce more completely than at any other place. Nathanael, in his own native village, saw the promise made to him fulfilled—the heavens opened and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man. In that Bethel revelation of the reality of Jacob's vision, he saw greater things than what astonished and convinced him at first—the Saviour's supernatural vision of him when he sat beside his home in Cana, under the shadow of the fig-tree, the favourite place of secret devotion to the pious Israelite.

We should have expected that such a wonderful miracle would have produced a profound impression upon the spectators—that it would have called forth looks and exclamations of astonishment. But there is no mention made of such an impression; we hear no sounds of

triumph. The calmness and composure with which the marvel is told is remarkable, and is itself an evidence of its authenticity—so different would it have been in the case of a spurious wonder. Scripture, in its unerring wisdom, leaves a blank for the imagination to fill, in regard to the immediate outward effect of the miracle. But it proceeds to tell us the abiding spiritual effect. That effect was twofold. It showed forth the glory of the Worker, and it called forth the faith of the beholder.

The first effect was to show forth the glory of the Worker: "and manifested forth His glory." This word "glory" is one of the words peculiar to the Gospel of St. John—words which bear upon them the Divine signature, and raise the thoughts to the unseen and eternal. It is a word that, like a star, burns with its own light, and sheds its radiance over every sentence in which it occurs. It means literally a shining presence, the lightening forth of that which is always. The glory of Christ is inherent and eternal. He is the absolute light who radiates light from Himself. The glory which He had with the Father, before the world

was, He did not lay aside when He became incarnate, but like the sun hidden by a cloud—or a star by the daylight—it was a veiled effulgence, not so much requiring an effort for its manifestation, as a restraint to hinder its beaming forth before eyes that could not bear the sight, or that might profane it. In the earthly tabernacle of Jesus there was the constant presence of the Shechinah. Ever and anon we read that glimpses of it appeared to those who were admitted into closest fellowship with Him; and again and again were they commanded to tell no man what they had seen and heard. On one occasion it is said that the disciples "were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid." It was the awful beauty of the Godhead flashing out upon them that produced this impression; and doubtless it was the same revelation that caused the crowd, that came to seize Him in the garden of Gethsemane, to fall back to the ground. The confession of Peter was elicited, more by the overpowering effect of His constant presence, than by any exceptional displays of miraculous power. And when the Sun of

Righteousness shone forth in all His glory, without any cloud to intercept His rays, on the Mount of Transfiguration, it is significantly said that "He was transfigured before them;" as if this were but one signal instance of what was a common experience to Jesus—a special manifestation to man of a glory known to Himself, and always seen by heavenly eyes. After His ascension, this glory was the permanent disclosure of His presence when He appeared to man on earth. It was thus that He dazzled and blinded the eyes of St. Paul on the way to Damascus, and caused the beloved disciple to fall down at His feet, as one dead, in Patmos. It was a glory not assumed for the occasion, but the glory which He ever had; once veiled by the conditions of His humiliation, but now revealed without a shadow. Of this perpetual, indwelling, essential glory of Jesus, the miracle of Cana was a manifestation. It was a bright ray shining through the cloud—a sparkling overflow of an inward never-intermitting fountain.

In this respect the miracles of Jesus are unique. It is never said of the wonderful works

which the prophets before Christ and the apostles after Him performed, that they manifested forth their glory. These messengers of God were mere instruments in the Divine hand; and the mighty works which they wrought were meant to show forth His glory, and illustrate His power and grace. But Christ wrought His miracles immediately and directly by His own inherent and underived power, and therefore they manifested forth His own glory. They directed attention to His person as the visible manifestation of the invisible God. They were the halo of Divinity around His sacred head. St. John, by calling them "works," implies that they were just such acts as might have been expected from Him being what He was; the natural, inevitable acts of Him whose name is "The Wonderful," whose very existence is the highest miracle of all. Previously to the conversion of water into wine, the servants and guests regarded Him as only an ordinary man. There was nothing in His conversation or appearance to distinguish Him from other men. No doubt He had acquired a reputation for His consistent

and unvarying goodness, but the qualities which He displayed had nothing superhuman about them, so far as the bridal company could judge. His glory was so far hidden from their view by His perfect humanity. But now His hour had come ; and when the water in the vessels which the servants drew became wine, the astonishing transmutation disclosed the Divine Presence ; and from His looks and tones, as from the windows of an illuminated fane, streamed forth upon the spectators the unspeakable glory of God.

How marvellously were blended the human and the Divine in Jesus! "How the God appears when the man is most conspicuous!" It is He, who sits weary and thirsty beside the well of the patriarch, who reveals Himself and is acknowledged as the Messiah. It is He, who falls asleep from sheer exhaustion in the boat, who bids the winds and the waves be still, and conquers on the other shore the powers of evil. It is He, who weeps bitter tears by the grave of His friend, who causes the gates of death to open and release their prisoner. Ever the balance

of His humiliation is readjusted by some surpassing vision of His glory. Over the cradle of His infant weakness are the illuminated heavens, and the wonderful star of Bethlehem. Angels minister to Him after the hunger of the temptation. At His baptism,—though purer than the water itself, and though His righteousness made that of His baptizer appear like a limpid lake that shows black as ink beside the snow on its shore,—the exhibition of His voluntary abasement for our sakes drew from His Father that peculiar confession of His love, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and bound together by new bonds of endearment the persons of the glorious Trinity. And here, in the miracle of Cana, the peasant guest called to the marriage feast manifested Himself as the Divine Creator. He who accepted human hospitality, and shared in the scanty supply of the feast, gave to His entertainers, both in quantity and quality, what their own poverty failed to provide.

The glory of Jesus was not shown by the mere miracle; it is not the miraculous that is

specially Divine. A miracle is in reality a limitation of God rather than a glorification of Him, just as the Incarnation—the supreme miracle—was a humiliation of Jesus, a putting aside of His infinitude, in order that we might apprehend Him within the limits of our own nature and life. A miracle is a window that limits the view which it enables us to see—a toning down of the light into the shades of afternoon, which permits us to look upon the sun whose radiance would be intolerable to us at noon. It is not God doing more than in nature, but doing less. It is God emptying Himself—becoming for our sakes less Divine as it were—sharing the limitation and imperfection of our action—that we may truly see Him. There is more true glory in the ordinary operations of nature, in the ever constant order of the world, than in any miraculous work. How much wonder and loveliness were overpassed in the miracle of Cana! The gradual unfolding of the tender greenness and graceful shape of the foliage; the slow disclosure of the hidden sweetness and fragrance of leaf and blossom and fruit; the

elaboration of the wine, first in the vessels of the yellow stem and branches, and through the intricate cells of the leaves, then through the odorous blossoms, and lastly in the transparent goblets of the golden or purple grapes; all this wonderful series of ever changing but ever lovely forms and colours, into which the dews and showers of heaven are metamorphosed in their passage into wine in the vineyard, was obliterated. And instead of the long feast of beauty for almost every sense, spread over a whole summer, there were only a few firkins of wine created at once, to gratify a single sense, during a few hours', or a few days', social enjoyment.

But for what was thus lost there was ample compensation made. The Divine nature of Jesus reveals itself in the, so to speak, imperfection of the miracle. That which was constant ceases for a while, that its constancy may be realised; that which was all-pervading is partially withdrawn, in order that men may awake to the consciousness of its presence; a vacuum is made by the miracle, to show the presence of a ubiquitous element. Nature is set aside, that the supernatural may

be seen. The beauty of the veil is drawn up out of sight, that the overpowering beauty of the object which it concealed may be clearly shown. That which was obliterated, in what seemed a dead course of things in the vineyard, is found in a *living Person.* The attention usually given to the objects of nature, and to the ordinary ways of God's providence, is concentrated upon Jesus. The True Vine, by whose living power the water is changed at once into wine, displays a greater glory in the act than the natural vine in all its long course of development. The loss of the natural beauty in the miracle, a beauty which is relative, passing, and perishing, is truly a great gain when it reveals to us the higher moral beauty of the altogether lovely One, a beauty that is absolute, perfect, self-sustained; and a limited process of creation may well be obliterated without regret, when in its place we find Him in whom creation and the Creator meet in reality, in whom God unites and reconciles all things that are in heaven and in earth. For the humiliation and limitation of the miracle, as part of the humilia-

tion and limitation of the Incarnation, God highly exalts Jesus, and gives Him a name which is above every name.

But not only did the miracle of Cana manifest forth the glory of our Lord's person; it also manifested forth the glory of His work. Some have not hesitated to call in question the propriety of the miracle, on the ground that it seems to be without a moral end, without any urgent necessity; not an emanation of mercy, but the providing of a superfluous, if not even a noxious, indulgence at a feast. And the attitude of others towards it is more apologetic than commendatory; so many things about it requiring in their estimation to be qualified or explained away. All these objections vanish when we attentively consider the miracle; and out of the cloud of dust which they have raised about it, it emerges purer and grander in its own Divine simplicity. It had indeed a high moral purpose to serve. It illustrates not only the power but the character of Jesus, and the nature of His mission. It shows His wonderful unselfishness, ministering to the enjoyments of others, when

He refused to satisfy His own necessities; His tender sympathy, not alone with the wants and woes, but also with the joys and festivities of men; His willingness to help in time of need; His approval of the pure affections, and innocent enjoyments, and natural ties of life. Instead of disdaining the common things of the world, it was wrought for the very purpose of imparting to them heavenly glory. It makes joy sacred; it makes marriage honourable; it consecrates our daily life and our common home. It sheds a new glory upon the world of nature, and shows that it is not an alien realm, but an integral part of the Father's kingdom. It reveals to us wonders that the open eye and loving heart may always see in the smallest and most familiar things. It gives solemnity and awfulness to the investigations of science, for it tells us that without the Word of God was not anything made that was made.

The wine of Cana is the type and image of all the work of Jesus. The water of earthly things, with their utilitarian uses, passed by His blessing into the wine of heavenly symbols. Everything in Nature's

great "chamber of imagery," that before spoke of the fall and the curse, is now consecrated to a new symbolism, as typical of life, renewal, and blessedness. Christianity has put its own higher thoughts and meanings and purposes into the common language of men. It exalts the significance of the old Greek and Latin words which it uses. God, man, faith, charity, righteousness, paradise, convey ideas formerly altogether unknown, or imperfectly understood. The gospel permanently enriches and expands every tongue into which it is translated. Sibree, in his work on Madagascar, informs us that, by the introduction of Christianity into the island, many Malagasy words, such as those employed as equivalents for "grace," "faith," "righteousness," "justification," &c., have been purified and raised to a higher level. They have now a fulness and meaning which they never conveyed to the natives in their heathen condition. The very symbolism of heathendom which Christianity adopts, it invests with a purer and grander significance. The cross, formerly a common pagan symbol of obscenity, an instrument of the lowest shame, is now

a sceptre of power, an emblem of the kingly might of self-sacrificing love; so that an apostle can say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." The palm speaks of a nobler victory, the anchor of a surer hope, and the crown of a heavenly glory. Orpheus becomes Christ, who, by the magic music of His gospel, subdues and attracts all creation to Him. Pagan sarcophagi were used for the burial of Christians; and we find, in the Catacombs of Rome, the subjects of a pastoral or pagan character, carved upon them, invested with a higher symbolical meaning, and adapted to the Christian system.

In a still more wonderful manner was the water contained in the waterpots of the Old Testament changed into the wine of the kingdom of heaven. The Epistle to the Hebrews, from beginning to end, is but one long explanation of this miracle of grace—this transfiguration and transmutation of the whole earlier religious history of the Jews into typical representations of the fresh world of faith and hope and love, which is opened up by the Christian dispensation. And He who at

Cana changed the baser element into the nobler, the weaker into the stronger, can effect a similar change in human hearts and lives by His transforming grace. We who are weak shall become strong; we who are earthly shall become heavenly; we who are passing and perishing shall have life eternal. He who gives us first water, without which we cannot live, afterwards counsels us to buy of Him wine and milk: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, let him buy wine and milk without money and without price." He gives us first the necessaries and then the luxuries of the Christian life. It is not a mean life of privation that He gives, but a rich and noble life. "I am come," He says, "that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." And all His dealings with us, even our sorrow and losses, are designed to make our life richer, larger, fuller.

In these various ways then, by its direct effects, and its symbolical teachings, the miracle of Cana manifested forth the glory of Christ's person and work. The glory shone through the cloud of

obscurity which had so long enveloped Him, in the manner of that still and peaceful light which He chose as the highest and holiest symbol of Himself; that force in nature which is so quiet, and calm, and regular, that it seems more the hiding than the manifesting of His power. It burst forth, through the sheath of His humble appearance and circumstances, like some rare and radiant blossom, that emerges out of common foliage, with strange suddenness and unexpectedness to the unobservant eye; whereas the flower was from the first in preparation, an integral part of the idea of the plant, and the practised eye could discern its embryo, even when the leaf-buds had scarcely begun to open.

The second effect of the miracle was to call forth the faith of the spectators: "His disciples believed on Him." We are not to suppose that this was the beginning of their faith, and that it was the miracle that produced it. The previous chapter tells us that the disciples who were present at the marriage feast, John, Andrew, Philip, Simon, and Nathanael, had accepted Him as the Messiah upon the testimony of John the

Baptist, and upon the evidence of what they themselves had seen and heard in their first intercourse with Him. The witness of John and the personal authority of Jesus wrought a deep conviction in their minds. The discipleship of John had prepared them for the discipleship of Jesus. The former had opened up questions of sin and salvation which were fully answered by the latter. Jesus cast the unearthly spell of His purity and beauty upon them, and drew them to His side as the magnet draws the iron. They forsook all and followed Him. Every longing of their higher nature, every hope of their nation and of their own immortal spirits, was met and fulfilled in Him. They believed, not as the result of any display of supernatural power, but before any miracle had been done. But this first faith of the disciples, notwithstanding its appearance of suddenness and maturity, was crude and imperfect. It was just such a faith as we should expect in mere beginners. The mirror was not sufficiently burnished to catch the full clear image of Christ; the facets of their minds were not adequately cut and

polished to refract all the superhuman radiance that played upon them from the Sun of Righteousness. They recognised in Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and of their own Messianic hopes, but not the Divine Son of God; and the value of their faith consisted, not in its maturity or accuracy, but in the fact that however imperfect it brought them into intimate personal association with Him, in whose society it would blossom and ripen into fulness of knowledge. Were it not for this preparedness as the result of previous belief, the miracle of Cana, wrought as it was so quietly and naturally, would not have produced such a profound impression upon the disciples. But brought thus into a state of quickened sympathy with Him, made spiritually *en rapport* with Him, they understood the significance of the miracle, and their faith was rewarded and confirmed by it. They knew more perfectly who He was, and confided in Him more implicitly. The miracle was wrought in themselves; the water of their previous weak faith was changed into the wine of

a nobler, devoted faith, which, working by love, purified their hearts, and enabled them to overcome every obstacle and temptation as they followed Jesus in the way.

"His disciples believed on Him." We see the gradual process of their training. The testimony of John the Baptist, whose disciples they had previously been, had led them to come to Christ; personal intercourse with Christ converted them from followers into disciples; and then a miracle, as a sign of Divine power and grace, changed disciples into believers. That phrase, "believed on Him," is almost peculiar to the writings of the beloved disciple. Only in two places does it occur in all the synoptical Gospels; and the Apostle Paul, whose vocabulary it more closely resembles than that of any other Scripture writer, but very rarely uses it. It denotes the absolute transference of trust from one's self to another. To believe on or in a man means so much more than simply to believe him. In believing a man we confide in the mere truthfulness of his lips; we believe that he is incapable of telling a falsehood. But

in believing on or in a man, we trust the man's whole being and life, we confide in himself. The disciples of Jesus not only believed the words of Jesus, from whose lips no guile could come; they believed in Himself as the fulfilment of all their hopes and expectations, their highest ideal of the truth. A deeper confidence than they could have in themselves they had in Him. He was to them indeed all that He claimed to be,—"He that should come."

Jesus never wrought a miracle for directly evidential purposes. He appealed to men's consciences and hearts, and not to their senses. If they could only be persuaded by His doing some wonderful work, then He refused to gratify them. He disapproved of the kind of faith which could only be produced by miracles. "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." He wished Himself to be His own evidence — wished to secure men's confidence and love by what He was, more than by what He did. "Believe Me," was His first injunction, and only when His personal influence failed to produce any impression upon

men of blunted spiritual sensibilities, did He substitute, "or else believe Me for the very work's sake." It was not for the purpose of creating astonishment, but for the confirmation of faith and love, that He wrought miracles. Only when He had previously drawn out some sign of personal trust in Himself did He proceed to deepen that trust by some mighty work of a suitable kind; and the merely astonishing element in it was always absorbed in the higher object of revealing His own true nature, as the Lord of heaven and earth, who came to redeem the world which He had made from the evil that had come upon it. And this fact, that Jesus Himself gave a subordinate place to the faith produced by miracles, and that the first disciples believed without any miracle, shows to us that we are not placed at a spiritual disadvantage by the cessation of these outward signs and wonders. We are apt indeed to think that a miracle would produce in our minds the conviction which the ordinary means of grace we possess too often fail to create. We crave for a sign from heaven,

and fancy that it would be easy to enter the kingdom of God through the gate of the senses, and under the guidance of wonder and awe. We have an instinctive longing for some natural, sensible approach to God. But this is a delusion. Without personal holiness no man shall see the Lord; and only by that moral and spiritual process which assimilates us to the Divine likeness can we approach and realise Him. To the pure in heart alone is He visible—and only in proportion to their purity.

To such a process a miracle would be a hindrance and not a help. It would draw away the attention from spiritual to sensible things, and would be, as it has been well said, like an astronomer taking a candle to see the stars. A miracle would dazzle our eyes by the little circle of light which it produced immediately around us—enabling us to see the objects at our feet; but this earthly light would prevent us from seeing the calm eternal worlds beyond. The infinite heights of heaven can only be seen by the light which emanates from themselves. The miracle might produce a temporary impression,

by displaying to us something of the greatness and power of God, but it would undoubtedly hinder us from entering into that permanent union of faith and love with Him which can alone save the soul. It would lead to a transient, superficial acquaintance with some of His attributes, but it would hide from us the knowledge of Himself; and we should be in the position of those who are represented as appealing to Christ for admission into heaven, on the plea that they have eaten and drunk in His presence, and He has taught in their streets, while He repudiates them by saying, "I never knew you." And therefore, although the recorded miracles of Scripture had, and still have, their own most important and most necessary purpose to serve as evidential works, we can truly say that God has "provided some better thing for us." If we believe in Jesus, we shall see greater things than the disciples saw in the marvel of Cana. We ourselves shall become new creatures; and all that is truest and most significant in the miracle will come within our own experience. Our knowledge and belief, beginning

in the letter, will pass on to the spirit. And the miracle of grace in our own hearts and lives will accomplish, in our case, what the miracle of Cana accomplished in the case of the disciples; it will manifest forth the glory of Jesus, and our faith in consequence will become clearer, more vital, and enduring.

THE END.

LONDON: R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS.

MESSRS. MACMILLAN AND CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

TWO WORLDS ARE OURS. Second Edition. Globe 8vo. 6*s*.

"We have never met a more charming exposition of the parables, and the figurative language of the Bible. There is an indescribable grace in the style that fascinates the reader and keeps his attention fixed. Few will take up this beautifully written volume without reading it through, and none who read it but will clearly see the meaning of the parables more clearly than he ever did before."—*Dundee Advertiser.*

BIBLE TEACHINGS IN NATURE. Fourteenth Edition. Globe 8vo. 6*s*.

"He has made the world more beautiful to us, and unsealed our ears to voices of praise and messages of love that might otherwise have been unheard. We commend the volume not only as a valuable appendix to works on natural theology, but as a series of prose idyls of unusual merit."—*British Quarterly Review.*

THE MINISTRY OF NATURE. Fifth Edition. Globe 8vo. 6*s*.

"He gathers his illustrations from many sources, and uses them with great felicity. His observations are full of suggestiveness, and whether the reader agrees or not with his conclusions he will acknowledge he is in the presence of an original and thoughtful writer."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

THE TRUE VINE; OR, THE ANALOGIES OF OUR LORD'S ALLEGORY. Fourth Edition. Globe 8vo. 6*s*.

"It abounds in exquisite bits of description, and in striking facts, clearly stated. . . . We haveread the book with not a little pleasure, and can recommend it."—*Nonconformist.*

HOLIDAYS ON HIGH LANDS; OR, RAMBLES AND INCIDENTS IN SEARCH OF ALPINE PLANTS. Second Edition, revised and enlarged. Globe 8vo. 6*s*.

"A series of delightful lectures on the botany of some of the best known mountain regions."—*The Guardian.*

MACMILLAN AND CO., LONDON.

MESSRS. MACMILLAN AND CO.'S PUBLICATIONS—(*continued*).

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE SABBATH OF THE FIELDS. Being a Sequel to "Bible Teachings in Nature." Fourth Edition. Globe 8vo. 6*s*.

"The volume, like all Dr. Macmillan's productions, is very delightful reading. . . . Imagination, natural science, and religious instruction, are blended together in a very charming way."—*British Quarterly Review.*

FIRST FORMS OF VEGETATION. Second Edition, corrected and enlarged; with numerous illustrations. Globe 8vo. 6*s*.

"Mr. Macmillan's book is pleasantly written and well illustrated, and will be welcomed alike by the botanist or general reader."—*Academy.*

OUR LORD'S THREE RAISINGS FROM THE DEAD. Globe 8vo. 6*s*.

"He has written a book, on one of the most trying themes, which is at once edifying and instructive, full of devotional fervour as of fine thought We have ourselves read it with peculiar pleasure, and we are sure that others would do the same."—*Nonconformist.*

DR. ALEXANDER MACLAREN'S NEW VOLUME OF SERMONS.

THE SECRET OF POWER, and other Sermons. Preached at Manchester. By ALEXANDER MACLAREN. Fcap. 8vo. 4*s*. 6*d*.

SERMONS PREACHED AT MANCHESTER. By ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D. Ninth Edition. Three Series. Fcap. 8vo. Each 4*s*. 6*d*.

The *Spectator* characterises them as "vigorous in style, full of thought, rich in illustration, and in an unusual degree interesting."

"The style is always clear, simple, and effective, and frequently it rises to all the fervour of a glowing eloquence, and the discourses as a whole are well fitted to quicken the religious thought and stimulate the devout feeling of a congregation."—*Nonconformist.*

"Sermons more sober and yet more forcible, and with a certain wise and practical spirituality about them, it would not be easy to find."—*Spectator.*

WEEK-DAY EVENING ADDRESSES. Delivered in Manchester. By ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D. Third Edition. Fcap. 8vo 2*s*. 6*d*.

"Every sentence tells. The teacher preaches, and his preachings touch and lift all that is best in us."—*British Quarterly Review.*

MACMILLAN AND CO., LONDON.

52